

## **LABELLING FOOD-RELATED SLANG TERMS FOR NATIONALITIES IN LEARNER'S DICTIONARIES OF ENGLISH**

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**Abstract:** The present paper attempts to highlight the problems related to the usage label “slang” and to usage notes indicative of negative connotations (“offensive”; “disapproving”; “derogatory”) for certain words, taking into account monolingual dictionaries for learning English. The aim of the analysis is to investigate if there is any consistency in the labelling policy of these dictionaries, since some compilers emphasize that the definition of the slang term is sufficient to convey its negative connotations and does not require a label. In order to accomplish this goal, a corpus consisting of a series of twenty slang terms for nationalities will be taken into consideration. The paper will examine whether the label “slang” fluctuates in these dictionaries for learning English. It will also argue that the results of an analysis of labelling practices in dictionaries are essential because they provide an overview of perspectives towards slang and a possible response to the issue of whether the current lexicographic labelling system is appropriate.

**Keywords:** usage label, slang, derogatory language, English Learner’s Dictionaries

### **1. Introduction**

Usage labels are significant to users in general and especially to the learners of a foreign language because they provide them with specific information on restrictions of usage. However, even though usage labels are widely employed, “their use is inconsistent, since the same word will not appear under the same label from one dictionary to the next” (Abecassis 2008: 3). Lexicographers acknowledge this difficult task of labelling words in dictionaries (Crenn 1996), being well aware that dictionaries “fall well short of perfection” (Leech & Nessi 1999: 259). Due to the lack of consistency in the labelling policy in lexicography, guiding users (especially those who are not native speakers) proves to be a challenging task.

As Landau (2001) points out, dictionaries reflect changes in society (232). Therefore, when compiling a dictionary, lexicographers must also take into account slang terms that reflect insults addressed to one’s nationality/race/ethnicity/gender. Béjoint (2010: 207) notes that, sometimes certain slang terms, which are considered ethnic slurs, are omitted from dictionaries, in order to avoid offending someone, but by omitting them, this becomes a “a way of denying their existence”. Nowadays, lexicographers have started to include more of these terms, which are potentially offensive to one’s nationality (Béjoint 2010: 207). Therefore, the challenging task of labelling such terms becomes one of importance, in order to clarify the meaning and the connotations carried by such words, as a warning to users about their potential offensiveness.

The purpose of the present research is to investigate the label “slang” in learner’s dictionaries of English and to establish to what extent the terms registered by dictionaries

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are considered offensive. To accomplish this, the study will concentrate on dictionaries acknowledged as being representative in their field by several metalexigraphers, such as: *Oxford Learner's Dictionary* (henceforth *OALD*), *The American Heritage Dictionary for Learners of English* (henceforth *AHD*), *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (henceforth *CALD*), *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (henceforth *LDOCE*), *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (henceforth *MED*) and *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's English Dictionary* (henceforth *COBUILD*).

In order to illustrate the different use of labels, I have compiled a corpus of twenty slang terms, epithets from the same semantic area, which are classified as food-related ethnic insults in Jonathon Green's *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang* (2006) and *Green's Dictionary of Slang* (2023) two specialized reference slang dictionaries. The following terms, which are widely used in modern English and present in all of the aforementioned learner's dictionaries of English, comprise : *limey*, *lobster-back*, *pommie* and *rosbif* (for British); *haggis*, *porridge stuffer/ porridge wog/porridge-dribbler* and *scotch* (for Scottish); *frog/toad*, *garlic-eater*, *grape-smasher/grape-stomper* and *snail-eater* (for French); *garlic-eater/garlic-snapper*, *grape stomper/grape-smasher*, *macaroni/macaroni-fresser* and *spaghetti head* (for Italian) *boche*, *kraut/kraut-eater/krauthead*, *pretzel* and *sausage* (for German). All of these slang terms, which designate European nationalities, have been chosen for analysis and comparison, taking as a starting point the dates of their initial use (according to Green 2006) and the variety of English with which they are connected. Future research will aim to provide a comparison between the lexicographic representation of European nationalities and those of other continents.

The present research will enable us to have an overview of the lexicographic representation of slang and of how dictionaries treat potentially insulting nationality terms, as well as to identify the shortcomings that may occur in dictionaries when it comes to marking such slang terms. Since discrepancies in this system can be problematic for dictionary users, particularly for English language learners, it is possible to analyse to what extent the labelling policy is coherent, by examining the differences in the labelling systems in the previously mentioned learner's dictionaries.

## 2. Defining ethnic slurs

As Burridge (2004: 57) states, "language change typically follows social change". The meaning of words changes over time, and so does the concept of offensiveness. Different factors such as historical, social or political ones can have an effect on the expressions that are considered offensive (Battistella 2005: 83), and several categories can be used to classify offensive language. The three categories of offensive language discussed by Battistella (2005: 71) are: epithets, profanity, and vulgarity/obscenity. From this author's point of view, slurs that target a person's race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, appearance, ability or other attributes are known as epithets, while religious cursing is regarded as profanity. Battistella underlines that the words and expressions "which characterize sex-differentiating anatomy or sexual and excretory functions in a crude way" (Battistella 2005: 71) are what vulgarity and obscenity stand for, and he

further mentions that the distinction between the two is “mainly a matter of degree and prurience” (Battistella 2005: 71).

As mentioned by Norri (2000), the usage of slang words which are considered derogatory for nationalities has a double effect: on victims of such insults on the one hand, and on users on the other (Norri 2000: 78). In a detailed article about using such terms, Greenberg et al. (2018) present these effects by stating that users experience a boost in self-esteem, while the victims experience frustration and anger, since their “worth as individual human beings is denied through contempt for an entire group” (quoted in Norri 2000: 78).

Before delving into the matter of usage labels, one should establish the definition of such slang terms which concern nationality. Researchers in the domain proposed different terms referring to insults, such as: “ethnic slurs”, “ethnic epithets” or “ethnophaulisms”. As mentioned by Croom (2013: 179), slurs are “used by speakers primarily to identify members that possess certain descriptive features (e.g. race) and to derogate them on that basis”. Along the same lines, an “ethnic slur” derogates people based on their ethnicity. Battistella (2005) defines an “ethnic epithet” as a type of slur for ethnicity, used synonymously for ethnic slur (Battistella 2005: 72). Last but not least, “ethnophaulisms” have been defined as “verbal ethnic slurs to refer to out-groups” (Rice et al. 2010: 118). Both “epithets” and “ethnophaulisms” have been used interchangeably for slang terms denoting nationality, skin colour or race.

As discussed by Battistella (2005), some words can be offensive in many ways, causing harm to the victim (Battistella 2005: 83), but, depending on the environment, the same words are not as equally offensive. Polite speech and avoidance of such terms can be seen as a mark of sophistication, but in other contexts, it can also “establish lower-order solidarity” (84). As Michael Adams (2009) states in “Slang: The People’s Poetry”: “slang is often offensive, but it’s really defensive: the best defence is a great offense” (Adams 2009: 200). When it comes to offensive language and politeness, it is important to keep in mind that it may vary according to the domain, since defining politeness and offensiveness in terms of press conferences or speeches is different than defining it to a “common person” (Battistella 2005: 84). This proves that offensive language is context-dependent and that the degree of offensiveness varies, shifting over time, as summarised by Battistella (2005: 83):

What seems clear overall is that the notion of offensive language is a variable one, shifting over time, relative to domain (the workplace, broadcast media, literature, political discourse, polite conversation), and affected by social, historical, political, and commercial forces. It is clear as well that the range of offensive language extends from usage that is simply offensive to usage which is disruptive and harmful.

### **3. Indicating usage in dictionaries**

When addressing the issue of compiling a dictionary, lexicographers face a difficult task. Not only do they have to decide which words to include or to exclude, but they also need to decide what markers to use for each term. As Ptaszynski (2010) points out, the terminology used by dictionaries is diverse (Ptaszynski 2010: 411). His analysis mentions

terms such as linguistic labels (see Atkins & Rundell 2008), usage information (see Landau 2001), diasystematic information, diasystematic marking, restrictive labels and stylistic glosses (Ptaszynski 2010: 411). As Hartmann & James (1998: 80) propose, a label is defined as “a specialised symbol or abbreviated term used in reference works to mark a word or phrase as being associated with a particular usage or language variety”. This definition is accompanied by the observation that, since dictionaries differ widely, “consistency is rarely achieved” (80).

Researchers have introduced various systems for categorising labels, which has caused a heated debate among lexicographers, since “many labels are umbrella terms that conceal a good deal of variation” (Atkins & Rundell 2008: 496). In Landau’s opinion, the labelling system guides the reader how “to use a given language correctly, providing necessary information about its limitations of use” (Landau 2001, quoted in Stachurska 2018: 90). These usage comments given by dictionaries offer guidance on how to use words appropriately, taking into account possible restrictions of usage depending on the area, style or register (Landau 2001: 217).

Anna Stachurska (2018) discusses the most popular label classifications established by Milroy & Milroy (1990), Jackson (2002), Atkins & Rundell (2008), and Hausmann (1989). Milroy & Milroy (1990) list only two types of labels: group labels and register labels, Jackson (2002) proposes seven different types of labels: dialect labels, formality labels, status labels, effect labels, history labels, topic labels and usage labels (Stachurska 2018: 91-92) and more recently, while Atkins & Rundell (2008) distinguish seven types of labels: domain labels, dialect labels, register labels, style labels, time labels, attitude labels, meaning type labels and using labels (Atkins & Rundell 2008: 227-230). From Stachurska’s point of view, Hausmann’s list proves to be the most extensive and prolific, since he classifies labels into ten categories (Stachurska 2018: 192). Thus, even researchers seem to be uncertain about how to classify various labels and how to provide the users with the necessary usage information.

As mentioned by Landau (2001), there are cases when a label is not sufficient, since the meaning and the connotation of a word require more information (Landau 2001: 233). Landau (2001) states that in these situations, lexicographers may employ a usage note (233), which can be stated in the definition or even in more comprehensive usage notes (Ptaszynski 2010: 412). As Norri (2000) states in a study about labelling derogatory words, it seems that learner’s dictionaries have a tendency to use more labels or usage notes than general dictionaries. Norri further explains that this might be the case of the target audience, since learner’s dictionaries concern non-native speakers; therefore, lexicographers must use labels and usage notes with caution (Norri 2000: 91).

#### **4. Marking slang terms as “offensive” in learner’s dictionaries**

As Landau (2001: 232) points out, the labelling system of a dictionary reflects the views of the whole society. He further notes that since “dictionaries operate under the laws and norms of a specific society, those laws and norms are also reflected in dictionaries” (Landau 2001: 232). Therefore, potentially insulting words should be treated

meticulously. Offensiveness is marked in various ways depending on the dictionary used. To illustrate different ways of conveying the insulting nature of a word, let us address one of the slang terms selected from the corpus of this study: *frog* (for French) and examine three of the learner's dictionaries chosen for this paper:

*AHD*: *frog*, n. [*offensive, slang*] Used as a disparaging term for a person of French birth or descent.

*COBUILD*: *frog*, countable noun, [*informal, offensive*] Frogs is sometimes used to refer to French people.

*LDOCE*: *frog* [*taboo*] a very offensive word for someone from France. Do not use this word.

As one might note, each dictionary illustrates offensiveness through labels (“offensive”; “slang”; “taboo”) by stating it in the definition (“used as a disparaging term...”) or by providing a usage note (“do not use this word”). These warnings offer a strong recommendation to the reader, respectively the learner of English, against using such words.

As these examples have underlined, there are numerous labels that can be applied to potentially offensive slang terms, and each dictionary uses its own set of labels and defines them in its own way. Nonetheless, the usage of different labels proves to be problematic to learners, causing confusion, since there are no universal criteria to tell if certain words should be regarded as slang, offensive, informal, taboo, etc. Moreover, as discussed by Landau (2001: 232), labelling is also “a matter of the editor's personal opinions”. As Landau (2001: 232) argues, “the lexicographer is compelled to use his own experience, moderated of necessity by his own moral views, whether consciously or not”. Since dictionaries have their own policies concerning the definition and the usage label of slang words, “consistency is rarely achieved” (Hartmann & James 1998: 80), causing even more variation among labels and other markers of usage information (see also Vişan 2022, forthcoming).

## 5. Problematization of food-related slang terms for nationalities in learner's dictionaries

As mentioned by López-Rodríguez (2014: 16), “aversion towards other nationalities is often materialized in language through metaphors”, and, of all differences between humans, food choices are perhaps the most noticeable feature that sets people apart, becoming a strong marker of identity. As the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1850) says: “Der Mensch ist, was er ißt” ‘You are what we eat’. This is represented in language through metonymy, which is used here to associate food with a particular nationality in order to convey offensiveness. The selection of slang terms provided allows us to explore how nationality is depicted in terms of food. The British people are seen as *limey*, *lobsterback*, *pommie* or *rosbif*, while the Scottish people are *haggis*, *porridge-dribbler/wog/stuffer* or *scotch*. Along the same lines, the French are called *frogs/toads*, *garlic-eater*, *grape-stomper/smasher* or *snail-eater*. An Italian tends to

be seen as a *garlic-eater/snapper* and as a *grape stomper/smasher*, in the same manner as the French are, but also as *macaroni/makaronifresser* (by the Germans) or as a *spaghetti head*. Last but not least, names for Germans include *boche*, *kraut/krauthead/kraut-eater* (from *sauerkraut*), *pretzel* or *sausage*.

Before analysing the labelling system of the selected terms, I have provided in Table 1 the entry for each slang term with the information given by Jonathon Green's *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang* (2006) and *Green's Dictionary of Slang* (2023) such as: language variety, its dating, how long it was used for, and also extra information regarding the origin and motivation behind each slang word, provided by a recent online etymological dictionary (*Etymonline*):

Table 1. Entries for slang terms for European nationalities in Green (2006, 2023)

Nationality	Slang term	Meaning and Dating	Origin ( <i>Etymonline</i> )
British	<i>Limey</i>	( <i>orig. Aus.</i> ) an English person or sailing ship; 1916-2019	The British Royal Navy supplied a daily ration of lime or lemon juice to their sailors to prevent scurvy
	<i>Lobsterback</i>	a British soldier; 1821-1996	Redcoats in Revolutionary War
	<i>Pommie</i>	( <i>Aus./N.Z.</i> ) a British person, usu. an immigrant; 1901-2021	Of uncertain origin; one possible explanation would be a blend of <i>immigrant</i> and <i>pomegranate</i> (alluding to the red cheeks of English immigrants)
	<i>Rosbif</i>	a term used in France for an English person; 1823-1972	It is a reference to British eating habits, as a reply to the term given to French: <i>frogs</i>
Scottish	<i>Haggis</i>	a Scotsman; 1846-1984	Allusion to the fact that Scottish people eat haggis on Robert Burns Day
	<i>Porridge-dribbler</i>	a Scottish person; 1993	Mainly used by the British – based on Scottish people eating habits (porridge)
	<i>Porridge wog</i>	( <i>Aus./N.Z.</i> ) a Scotsman; 1885-1922	
	<i>Porridge stuffer</i> <i>Scotch</i>	a Scottish person; 1840-1977	Archaic synonym for Scottish; fell out of common use because of the association with whiskey, but now used

French	<i>Frog/Toad</i>	(also Bullfrog) a French person; 1654-2015	occasionally as a derogatory term Mainly used by the British –based on French eating habits (frog legs)
	<i>Garlic-eater</i>	(US) a French, Spanish, Portuguese or Italian person; 1865-2005	Allusion to their eating habits: spiced dishes seasoned with garlic
	<i>Grape-stomper</i> <i>Grape-smasher</i>	any person of Mediterranean origin, e.g. Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek; 1961-1983	Allusion to their customs of making wine by smashing grapes with their feet
	<i>Snail-eater</i>	(US) a French person; 1920-1924	Allusion to the French eating habit of snails
Italian	<i>Garlic-eater</i>	(US) a French, Spanish, Portuguese or Italian person; 1865-2005	Allusion to their eating habits: spiced dishes seasoned with garlic
	<i>Garlic-snapper</i>	(US) an Italian; 1942	Allusion to their eating habits: spiced dishes seasoned with garlic
	<i>Grape stomper</i> <i>Grape-smasher</i>	any person of Mediterranean origin, e.g. Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek; 1961-1983	Allusion to their customs of making wine by smashing grapes with their feet.
	<i>Macaroni</i> <i>Makaronifresser</i>	an Italian person; 1711-1822	Allusion to the famous macaroni noodle which originated in Italy Coming from German ( <i>fressen</i> – impolite term for eating equivalent for <i>feed</i> from English)
German	<i>Spaghetti head</i>	(US) an Italian; 1974-1983	Allusion to their eating habits
	<i>Boche</i>	a German, esp. a German soldier; 1914-1989	The French called the Germans this in WWII; <i>Boche</i> might be associated with <i>caboche</i> (literally cabbage-head)
	<i>Kraut</i> <i>Krauthead</i> <i>Kraut-eater</i>	(orig. US) a German or Austrian; 1833-2018	Short for <i>sauerkraut</i> , a popular German food

<i>Pretzel</i>	a German; 1944	Pretzels became famous for German immigration in the 19th century
<i>Sausage</i>	a German; 1886-1989	Allusion to their food (German sausages)

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For each nationality selected, a list of four slang terms was provided, all representing types of food well-known in those countries. As for the language variety, most of the included slang terms are originally from the U.S. (*garlic-eater*; *spaghetti head*; *kraut*), while others are from Australia or New Zealand (*limey*; *pommie*; *porridge dribbler*). With respect to the dating of these slang terms, most of them have been used since the 18<sup>th</sup> century (*lobsterback*, *rosbif*, *kraut*), while others originated later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (*pommie*, *grape-stomper*, *pretzel*), still being employed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the oldest entry is *frog* for French: early 1654, being still in use up until 2015.

Table 1 also sheds light on the fact that no slang term comes with usage notes/comments regarding its degree of offensiveness. Given that slang is occasionally viewed as an example of “bad language” as stated by Battistella (2005: 89), it is possible that slang dictionaries are not typically seen as works that would have to offer its reader an excessive amount of usage notes and other information. However, notably, the etymological dictionary I consulted marks only one term (*scotch*) as derogatory.

Before examining the labels under which these slang terms appear, it is important to summarize what each label entails, because these dictionaries differ from one another with regard to the labels they use to indicate offensiveness. Even though the selected corpus from Jonathon Green’s *Cassell’s Dictionary of Slang* (2006) and *Green’s Dictionary of Slang* (2023) defines all the lexical items as slang, each dictionary uses a wide range of labels, showing the degree of offensiveness, from labels like “informal” or “humorous” to labels like “taboo” or “offensive”. At a first glance, one might note that in all six dictionaries, the labels “offensive”, “derogatory”, “insulting” or “taboo” are described similarly as words that can cause offence or might be rude. Moreover, as we are going to see in the analysis of the labels used, *OALD* proves to be more cautious providing even in the description of the usage labels “taboo” and “offensive” the usage note: “you should not use these words”.

Table 2. Descriptions of the labels for ethnic epithets in English learner’s dictionaries

DICTIONARY	LABEL(S)	DESCRIPTION
<i>COBUILD</i>	informal	words or senses that may be widely used
	offensive	words that can be insulting
	slang	words or senses that are informal and restricted in context (members of a particular social group)
	old-fashioned	no longer in current use
	derogatory	words which are unpleasant with intent on the part of the speaker or writer



<i>CALD</i>	informal	words used in ordinary speech or writing
	old-fashioned	not used in modern English
	offensive	words that are very rude and likely to offend people
<i>LDOCE</i>	derogatory	words that show strong disapproval and lack of respect
	informal	words used in normal conversation
	taboo	words that should not be used because they are very rude or offensive
<i>MED</i>	offensive	words that should not be used because they are offensive
	informal	words that are more common in speech than in writing
	old-fashioned	no longer in current use
<i>AHD</i>	humorous	used in an ironic and often friendly way
	insulting	extremely rude and can cause offence
	slang	a kind of language occurring chiefly in casual and playful speech
<i>OALD</i>	offensive	words that can cause anger, displeasure, or resentment
	informal	words used between friends or in a relaxed or unofficial situation
	taboo	expressions that are likely to be thought by many people to be obscene or shocking; you should not use them
	slang	very informal language, sometimes restricted to a particular group of people, for example people of the same age or those who have the same interests or do the same job
	offensive	expressions that are used by some people to address or refer to people in a way that is very insulting, especially in connection with their race, religion, sex or disabilities; you should not use these words

Table 3 below illustrates the labelling system for all the learner's dictionaries mentioned above. The list of slang terms is accompanied by the label under which they appear in dictionaries. Since the slang terms appear under various labels, one can initially notice a lack of cohesion in the labelling system. As the table will show, the learner's dictionaries under analysis are not very homogenous when it comes to marking a particular word as offensive. The criteria used by lexicographers in selecting certain labels still remain a question to debate.

Table 3. Labelling ethnic epithets in English learner's dictionaries

Slang terms	COBUILD	CALD	LDOCE	MED	AHD	OALD
<i>limey</i>	informal (considered offensive)	informal old- fashioned	informal (slightly insulting)	informal old- fashioned	slang	informal (can be offensive)
<i>lobsterback</i>	informal	–	–	–	–	–
<i>pommie</i>	informal; disapproval (can cause offence)	informal; offensive	offensive	informal (slightly insulting)	offensive slang	informal (offensive word)
<i>rosbif</i>	informal	–	–	informal humorous (insulting word)	–	–
<i>haggis</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>porridge- dribbler/wog /stuffer</i>	offensive slang	offensive	taboo (very offensive)	offensive	offensive slang	taboo offensive slang
<i>scotch</i>	old- fashioned informal	old- fashioned	informal	informal	old- fashioned informal	informal
<i>frog/Toad</i>	informal offensive	informal offensive (extremely offensive)	taboo (very offensive word) do not use this word	insulting (offensive word)	offensive slang	taboo offensive slang (offensive word)
<i>garlic-eater</i>	derogatory slang	derogatory	–	–	offensive slang	–
<i>grape- stomper/gra pe-smasher</i>	offensive slang	derogatory	–	–	–	–
<i>snail-eater</i>	offensive slang	derogatory	–	–	–	–
<i>garlic- snapper</i>	offensive slang	derogatory	–	–	–	–
<i>grape- stomper/gra pe-smasher</i>	offensive slang	derogatory	–	–	–	–
<i>macaroni</i>	derogatory slang	–	–	–	offensive slang	–
<i>makaronifre sser</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>spaghetti head</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–

<i>boche</i>	derogatory slang	offensive	taboo (offensive word)	offensive (insulting word)	offensive slang	taboo offensive slang
<i>kraut/krauth eater/kraut- eater</i>	offensive slang	offensive	taboo (offensive word)	offensive (insulting word)	offensive slang	taboo offensive slang
<i>pretzel</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>sausage</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–

As expected, the analysis of the table shows that there is no true consistency regarding the labelling policy in these learner's dictionaries under comparison. The most used label in all learner's dictionaries is "slang" or "offensive". *COBUILD* has chosen for some slang terms the label "informal" (see *limey*, *lobsterback*, *pommie*, *frog*) probably because these terms have entered the general vocabulary of the English language and also because of their dating period, meaning they are not regarded as slang anymore. The lexicographers who compiled *COBUILD* have chosen also a second label to follow "informal": "disapproval" or "offensive". Interestingly, most slang terms share in their definition the following usage note: "considered offensive; can cause offence", which offers a strong prescriptive recommendation to the reader not to use it. As Norri (2000: 91) states regarding the labelling of derogatory words in learner's dictionaries: "it has probably been the compiler's intention to alert students to the risks involved in the use of some of these words". More recent terms, such as *porridge dribbler/wog/stuffer*, *garlic-eater*, *macaroni* or *boche* share two labels: "derogatory/offensive" and "slang", again a prescriptive recommendation for the learners of English not to use them. Slang terms such as *pretzel* and *sausage* do not have entries for slang, as they are only defined as types of food in the learner's dictionaries under analysis.

*CALD* uses the label "informal" for some of its terms: *limey* or *pommie*, with the observation that *limey* also shares the label "old-fashioned" and *pommie* as "offensive". From Landau's perspective, old-fashioned slurs are "no longer seen as much of a threat" (Landau 2001: 232). Most of *CALD*'s terms appear under the labels "derogatory" or "offensive": *garlic-eater*, *grape-stomper/grape-smasher*, *snail-eater* or *garlic-snapper* appear as "derogatory", while *boche* and *kraut* are under the label "offensive". It appears that *frog* has the most negative connotation of all, since it shares not only two labels: "informal" and "offensive", but also a usage note that warns users that the term is "extremely offensive" for French.

*LDOCE* views *limey* as "informal" and uses the adverb "slightly" in the definition stating that *limey* is "slightly insulting". This dictionary has preferred the label "taboo" instead of "slang" for most of its terms, but it appears once again that lexicographers recommend users in the definition of some slang terms that they are "(very) offensive words": *porridge dribbler/wog/stuffer*, *frog*, *boche* and *kraut*.

As shown in previous research that I have undertaken, *MED* prefers the label "informal" instead of "slang": *limey*, *pommie*, *rosbif* or *scotch*, but not without adding extra information about them in their definition: "slightly insulting" for *pommie*, and "humorous, insulting word" for *rosbif*. *Frog*, *boche* and *kraut* seem to be the most popular slang terms that are considered the most offensive since the labels used are: "insulting

(offensive word)” or “offensive (insulting word)”. The most coherent dictionary for learners seems to be AHD where most labels appear as “offensive” and “slang”, while *OALD* proves to be most cautious: *porridge dribbler/wog/stuffer*, *frog*, *boche* and *kraut* share not two, but three labels: “taboo”, “offensive” and “slang”. As opposed to the previously mentioned slang terms, *limey* is labelled as “informal” with a mild usage note that it “can be offensive”. One should bear in mind that certain slang terms, which appear in Jonathon Green’s *Cassell’s Dictionary of Slang* (2006) and *Green’s Dictionary of Slang* (2023), have not yet appeared in learner’s dictionaries, since the only entries found were the definitions for the food and not for nationalities, as in the case of *macaroni*, *pretzel* or *sausage*. Even though research has shown that dictionaries have improved, when it comes to newer slang terms such as *garlic-eater*, *grape-stomper/grape-smasher* or *snail-eater*, no entry was found in dictionaries such as *LDOCE*, *MED*, *AHD* or *OALD*, which proves that there is still room for improvement. This is why the inclusion of slang dictionaries is also important, as they tend to list rarer and newer words than learner’s dictionaries.

What is more, several dictionaries have constantly adjusted their offensiveness indicators using phrases like: “can cause...”, “slightly”, “usually”, etc. While Burridge (2002: 202) notes, “offensiveness is never an intrinsic quality of the word, but of the way it’s used and its context” and thus each term might theoretically be used non-offensively, one may wonder if this should be the case in each dictionary. Yet, Burridge (2004: 57) further observes that speakers rarely take the risk of using a “bad” word since the word’s derogatory meaning always dominates how expressions are interpreted.

By looking at the data in our small corpus (the number/choice of labels), one might conclude that the nationality which was most classified as offensive is represented by the Germans, followed by the Scottish and British, the French, and finally by the Italians. The slang terms for Italians have few labels or lack any label, as opposed to those for Germans where, even though no entry was found for *sausage* or *pretzel*, the labels for *boche* and *kraut* exceed any expectation, sharing in each dictionary presented two labels. Interestingly, Landau (2001: 232) classified *kraut* as an old-fashioned slur, which from his point of view, might not be such a threat, but the dictionaries prove the opposite. *Kraut* is still perceived as a disparaging term as it is labelled as “offensive” and “slang” in *COBUILD* and *AHD*, “offensive” in *CALD* and “taboo”, “offensive” and “slang” in *OALD*. Moreover, *LDOCE* and *MED* not only label the term as “taboo” or “offensive”, but they also add the usage note “offensive/insulting word”.

Although variation was to be expected, it occasionally exceeded expectations. As Norri (2000: 92-93) points out, discrepancies are always to be expected when comparing various works of different lexicographers. Landau (2001: 233) supports this point of view by stating that different dictionaries may not treat the same slang terms in the same way, since “there are no agreed-upon criteria for finding some usages offensive or contemptuous or abusive”, and therefore, there is no uniformity when addressing the issue of labelling such terms.

Learner’s dictionaries tend to use warnings more often than general dictionaries of English (Norri 2000: 91), a fact demonstrated by the abundance of labels, usage labels or supplementary information in the definition of the slang terms analysed above. Nevertheless, Landau (2001) wonders if all these warnings are necessary, since the same information is repeated multiple times in a single entry (Landau 2001: 234), concluding

that, perhaps, dictionaries overuse markers of offensiveness. The majority of the dictionaries under analysis do not use one uniform technique to mark potentially offensive terms: they use labels (which are not consistent), state this in the definition or provide usage notes. As discussed by Atkins & Rundell (2008) there is “quite a lot of work involved in putting together a consistent policy on labels in a dictionary” (Atkins & Rundell 2008: 231) and it appears that a more consistent policy is also needed in the case of labelling food-related slang terms for nationalities.

## 6. Conclusions

This paper has overviewed the issue of labelling food-related slang terms for European nationalities in learner's dictionaries of English. Based on various learner's dictionaries, we are able to reach the first and foremost conclusion that, at present, labelling proves to be a problematic area of lexicography. As previous lexicographers have emphasized, a more precise way to systematize usage labels is needed (Atkins & Rundell 2008: 496), especially in the case of potentially derogatory terms. Such terms are, certainly, a necessary part of learner's dictionaries. Busse (2000: 173) has argued that, even though slang terms such as *frog* or *kraut* are insulting to French and Germans, learners of English need to know their connotations when they encounter them, and he advises on including such terms in dictionaries. Thus, people should be made aware of the racist ideology conveyed in slang terms for nationalities, and it is the responsibility of lexicographers to examine more carefully such slang terms and to include them with an appropriate label in order to mark their present-day connotations.

Secondly, since some labels in learner's dictionaries overlap or others are considered as synonymous, perhaps the process of labelling should be optimized by discussing the parameters of such an optimization. As previous scholars propose, it is possible to create a unified system of labelling, if each word is assigned only one label (Stachurska 2008: 105). A straightforward approach that always states the term's negative connotations in a uniform way (with a single label or in the definition) might be helpful to dictionary readers, especially to those who have not yet acquired a good command of the English language. In this manner, the reader would always know where to search for the information, and that might make it simpler to establish if a certain word is slang or not, or if indeed that word conveys negative connotations.

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