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SEMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MARITIME TERMS

ABSTRACT

The study of semantics has long been the domain of different scientists, such as psychologists, philosophers and anthropologists. Only lately, in the 20th century, have linguists taken a serious interest in it, so that gradually we came to know about linguistic semantics. But this deals only with one aspect of meaning, i.e., how meaning is affected by the interrelation of words. This is probably one of the reasons why the linguistic approach has been safely confined only to theoretical aspects of general English, leaving aside language for specific purposes. That is to say, technical terms must consider concepts and referents to a greater extent. Our paper attempts to fill this gap by providing a semantic structure of maritime English.

Key words: semantic field, lexeme, semantic relationship, metaphor and metonymy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Semantics is relatively modern science. Although the subject it represents is very old, it did not come to be systematically studied until 20th century. Yet, a comprehensive research into the study of meaning has been predominantly confined to its theoretical aspects. This claim can be supported by David Crystal's finding that little has been done so far on the semantic structure in English, attributing it to the »size and complexity of the English lexicon« (1995/97: 156). It is not surprising, considering delicacy of the subject matter. Drawing a neat line between individual semantic concepts frequently proves to be extremely difficult. Thus, facing concrete practical terminological problems resulting in certain conclusions always involves considerable risks. This certainly applies also to maritime terminology. Even so, if

we want to exploit the world of maritime semantics, which usually exists outside dictionaries, we are obliged to take this risk.

There are several definitions for the collocation semantic field. Some semanticists claim that it is merely the synonym of the collocation lexical field (Gabrovšek 1993: 75), others, by contrast, assert that the collocation semantic field is the field of concepts and not lexemes. Anyhow, we understand the semantic field as the field where lexemes are in a certain sense relation. In shipping they may, for instance, refer to the structural relations of the ship's hull: bow, midships, stern.

We should be aware of the fact that it is not easy to classify individual lexemes in semantic fields and that it is also difficult to define in what sense relation are certain lexemes of the same semantic field. Apart from that, we know that sense relations are subject to change in the course of time due to the changeable reality and our conceptual world respectively.

There are various semantic relationships in which lexemes exist: **synonymy**, **hypernymy**, **hyponymy**, **antonymy**, **polisemy**, **homonymy**, **metaphor** and **metonymy**.

2. SYNONYMY

This is to our mind the most frequent and the most complex phenomenon in Maritime English. If two lexemes are synonymous, it means that they are replaceable (paradigmatic) without changing meaning, i.e. they have the same referent. Palmer (1981:89) even claims that »there are no real synonyms« and »that no two words have exactly the same meaning« as it »would be unlikely if two synonyms with exactly the same meaning could survive in a language«. Crystal is of the same opinion when he says that »there may be no such thing as a pair of *perfect synonyms*...Slight but detectable differences are invariably present.« But he further admits that »for most practical purposes, these differences can be ignored...« (1995/97: 164). It seems that Crystal's admission is often the case in Maritime English, e.g. *bow - head*, *helmsman - steersman - wheelman*, and *seaman - sailor*.

Although, in technical terms, we have been unable to detect semantic differences between the above examples, we allow some disagreement on whether or not they are *perfect synonyms*. But we do not see any reason to say that they have not survived, although they are all of Anglo-Saxon origin, which is not often the case with synonyms. Mostly one of them is of Anglo-Saxon origin and the other either of French, Latin or Greek, e.g. *sailor - mariner*, *unload - discharge*, *head - cover (marine engine)*,

shipment - consignment, bow - prow, wharf - pier, steam - vapour, sail - navigate, ... The “extent” of their synonymy is various, ranging from “great” to “small”. But regardless of that, we can already speak about synonymy when two lexemes are similar in meaning, so that they can be substituted in some contexts (Gabrovšek 1993: 81).

Now, let us see which are the “slight differences” between the synonyms *bow - head, helmsman - steersman - wheelman, and seaman - sailor*. Without research into the maritime language corpus, we dare claim that *bow* or *bows* is used more frequently than *head*, *helmsman* than *steersman* or *wheelman*, whereas the frequency of use between *seaman* and *sailor* probably depends on whether we speak about professional or general English texts. The former would appear more frequently in professional texts, and the latter, by contrast, would probably be preferred in general English. Further, *bow* is used in certain collocations, e.g. “I see the lighthouse on the *port bow*,” whereas *head* would be used in other collocations, e.g. “The ship is down *by the head*”. On the other hand, when the two words are used independently, e.g. when describing ships, *head* would unlike *bow* have a metaphorical connotation (human head - ship’s head). The lexemes *helmsman* and *steersman* refer to British, and *wheelman* to American English. As for their origin, the first two are much older and belong to Old English, whereas *wheelman*, according to Oxford English Dictionary, first appears in *Oregon State Journal* only in 1865. And even if we did not have this information, we could logically conclude that the term *wheelman* was made later than the first two, i.e. when wheels replaced tillers for steering ships.

Both *seaman* and *sailor* include after English law crewmembers other than officers (Kerchove 1961: 696). It should, however, be added that in practice the word *seaman* sometimes also includes officers. Apart from that, there is also a distinction in how the two terms are used in collocations, e.g. *able seaman, ordinary seaman, merchant seaman but sailor suit, a good/bad sailor, drunken sailor...* Strictly speaking, of the said collocations only the *able seaman* and *ordinary seaman* are maritime professional terms, as they form the part of official English merchant marine nomenclature. *Able seaman* refers to the seaman with the rank to be able to steer the merchant ship, whereas *ordinary seaman* has not reached that rank yet.

More frequently the phenomenon of synonymy occurs because of the British and American variant, e.g. *cargo ship - freighter, transport - transportation*, or due to the influence of other languages on English, e.g. *shipment - consignment, bow - prow, sailor - mariner, wharf - pier, steam - vapour, sail - navigate, unload - discharge, head - cover (marine engine)*. The first of all given examples is of the Anglo-Saxon and the second of the Romance origin. Their synonymy is of various “strength” and the use of different frequency.

Let us see them in turn:

shipment - consignment are interchangeable in maritime traffic in all contexts with no change of the referent when they denote “goods carried”. However, the term *shipment* seems to be more frequently used. Otherwise the two terms are polysemous and their other meanings do not overlap (e.g. *despatch, loading and carriage*);

bow - prow are interchangeable in all contexts with no change of the referent, except that *prow* is used rarely in technical texts;

the synonymy of *sailor* and *mariner* is “weaker”, as the latter is obsolete and used predominantly in fiction, commercial and legal texts. It frequently comprises all crewmembers, including the master, e.g. in the collocation *master mariner*;

wharf - pier are interchangeable with no change of the referent in the context of loading or discharging cargo. Otherwise *pier* has a more general meaning; it includes any “platform sticking out into water”, regardless of its function. It may be built only for tourist purposes;

steam - vapour only partly overlap, i.e. the result of water heated in boilers, otherwise *vapour* has a wider meaning and may comprise also other gaseous conditions of substances, e.g. oxygen;

sail - navigate are “weaker” synonyms, the former having wider and more general meaning, moving over the sea, which however may also include *controlling the vessel*, whereas the term *navigate* is used in a more narrowly professional sense, e.g. *steer the course, take a fix* etc., considering all professional skills required;

unload - discharge are interchangeable with no change of the referent in all maritime contexts. It is however interesting that *discharge* appears more frequently as an antonym to *load* (i.e. *load - discharge*) than to *unload* or sometimes also to *off-load* (i.e. *load - unload, load - off-load*), what would logically be expected;

head - cover are interchangeable and have the same referent when speaking of marine engines, e.g. in the collocations *cylinder head or cylinder cover*, however there is a slight difference pointing out a different function. The former reminds us of the “engine head”, carrying valves etc., and the latter about the part of the engine which covers the upper part of the liner, thus forming the combustion chamber.

In Maritime English it is generally difficult to determine when paradigmatic changes affect meaning or define the degree of synonymy. Nevertheless, we may

speak about synonymy when two lexemes are similar in meaning and are exchangeable in a different context (Gabrovšek 1993: 81).

Palmer (1981: 89-91) states that there are at least 5 ways on the basis of which synonyms differ. We shall try to find examples for all of the five ways:

1. When synonyms belong to different dialects; here we can include *geographical differences*, e.g. twisting and destructive windstorms, which in different parts of the world have different names, like: *hurricane* in Central America, *cyclone* in the Indian Ocean, *typhoon* in the western part of the Pacific Ocean and *Willy-Willies* in Australia. Also examples of American and British English counterparts can be classified in this group, like: *freighters - cargo ships, wrench - spanner, transportation - transport, left - port (ship's side), right - starboard (ship's side)*.
2. The words that are used in *different styles*, e.g. *She is flying light/She is sailing empty; We've got Iron Mike / We've got the auto-pilot control; That stick doesn't work, said the Bos'n / That derrick doesn't work, said the Boatswain*.
3. The words that differ only in their *emotive* or *evaluative meanings*, e.g. *chippy for carpenter*. Both synonyms have the same referent, i.e. their cognitive meaning is the same, while their connotation is different.
4. Words which have *collocational restrictions*, e.g. *shipping business and not e.g. *maritime business; marine engine and not e.g. *ship engine; motor vessel and not e.g. *engine vessel*.
5. Words that are *close in meaning*, e.g. *forwarding agent - shipping agent; harbour - port; officer - mate; docking - berthing - mooring; pier - jetty - quay*.

3. HYPERNYMY AND HYPONYMY

Two lexemes may be in a hypernymous or hyponymous relation, e.g. *ship* is a hypernym to *deck*, or viceversa, *deck* is a hyponym to *ship*. There are plenty of such relations in Maritime English where lexemes refer to the same class, e.g. *dry cargo ship - general cargo ship; liquid cargo ship - tanker*. The types of ships or the ship's manning represent typical hyponymic hierarchies, e.g. *ships - cargo ships - dry cargo ships - general cargo ships; or master - officers - petty officers - ratings*. The first of the listed lexemes is called the superordinate and the following are hyponyms.

4. ANTONYMY

Words that are opposite in meaning are called antonyms. It is often thought of as the opposite of synonymy. Palmer (1981: 94) states various types of antonymy, but we have found only what he calls "relational oppositions", e.g. *load - discharge; shipowner - charterer; shipper - consignee; bow - stern; afore - abaft; ahead - astern; poop - forecastle; at sea - on land; aboard - ashore...*

5. POLYSEMY AND HOMONYMY

We have seen above that it is rather difficult to determine which lexemes are synonymous in different contexts. It is easier, however, to discover which of the equal lexemes (the same words) have different meaning in different contexts provided that we know all possible meanings of the lexeme referred to. Such phenomenon is called *polysemy*. These examples are also abundant in Maritime English, e.g. *shipping: ships, carrying by ship, loading, taking in water; secure: protect, obtain, attach; dispatch: forwarding, speed, saved time, reward for saved time; dunnage: luggage, protecting material (cargo); freight: cargo, cost of transport; overhaul: overtake, examine in detail; log: a piece of tree trunk, surfboard, apparatus for measuring speed, diary; companion: fellow, comrade, ship's ladder, staircase, entrance to 'tween deck, safety covering over entrance.*

6. HOMONYMY

Homonymy is a phenomenon, which is very close to polysemy. It is often difficult to find out whether a lexeme is homonymous or polysemous. In homonymy the same lexeme has various meanings, like in polysemy, however, homonyms appear in dictionaries as separate entries. This means that there are particular reasons why the meanings of lexemes are not listed under the same entry. Most frequently the reason is their etymological independence, e.g. *port (ship's side); port (aperture); port (harbour); bearing (direction), bearing (engine part).); list (ship's inclination), list (of passengers or cargo); tilt (ship's inclination), tilt (a canvas roof on a boat); heel (ship's inclination), heel (part of mast, derrick or rudder); tier (of cargo loaded), tier (a short rope).*

There are also phenomena of homography, i.e. lexemes are spelled in the same way but pronounced differently, e.g. *lead [led] (weight for soundings); lead[li:d] (a piece of rope)* or homophony, when words are spelt differently but pronounced in the same way, e.g. *not - knot; straight - strait.*

7. METAPHOR AND METONYMY

More frequent than homography and homophony are the phenomena of metaphors, and metonymy. In both cases the transfer of meaning between two lexemes takes place. In a metaphor one word or collocation is used instead of another on the basis of referential similarity, e.g. *to come up the hawsepipe* instead of *to rise up to the licensed rank without formal sea training*. Here the referential similarity is between the climbing of stowaways up the anchor cable through the hawsepipe, instead of usual boarding along the gangway, and the unusual certification, e.g. boatswain. On smaller vessels, where the diameter of hawsepipes is smaller and does not allow men to pass through, there is similarity with rats boarding the ship in the same way. By contrast, when mates are forced to work as deckhands, the metaphorical transfer is made by the collocation to be *stuffed down the hawsepipe*. Similar examples are *heave up (anchor)* instead of *set sail* or *deep sea* instead of *open sea* etc.

Metonymy is a phenomenon of semantic change where an attribute is used for the whole, i.e. the meaning is extended, e.g. *rig* (ropes) instead of *rig* (equipment), *helm* (tiller) instead of *helm* (steering gear), *mate* (first deck officer) instead of *mate* (any deck officer).

The occurrence of metaphors is particularly interesting when two different languages are contrasted. This shows that each language uses different principles of forming metaphors. Following are a few examples of the parts of anchor reminding us of objects from everyday life in English and Slovene:

- palm* (correct: *lopata*, literally **dlan*), *lopata* would in back translation be **spade*;
 - crown* (correct: *križ*, literally **krona*), *križ* would be **cross*;
 - peak* (correct: *krepelj*, literally **vrh*, *konica*), *krepelj* would be **claw*;
- or a few other examples from marine engineering:

- water jacket* - in the main engine (correct: *vodni plašč*, literally: **vodni suknjič*), *vodni plašč* would be **water coat*;
- sleeve* (correct: *srajca*, literally: **rokav*), *srajca* would be **shirt* (note: *sleeve* is synonym for *liner* - *valjeva puša*);
- piston skirt* (correct: *batni plašč*, literally: **batno krilo*), *batni plašč* would be **piston coat*;
- worm gear* (correct: *polžasto gonilo*, literally **čvrno gonilo*), *polžasto gonilo* would be **snail gear*;
- fresh water* (correct: *sladka voda*, literally: **sveža voda*), *sladka voda* would be **sweet water*;
- foot* (correct: *peta*, literally: **stopalo*), *peta* would be **heel* (the lower part of connecting rod);

shell (correct: *skodelica*, literally: **školjka*), *skodelica* would be **cup* (bearing);
web (correct: *rame*, literally: **plavalna kožica, mreža*), *rame* would be **shoulder* (part of crankshaft);
crank (correct: *ročica*, literally: **kljuka*), *ročica* would be **handle* (part of crankshaft).

8. CONCLUSION

We experience semantic fields of maritime terminology like water streams intermingling in the immense ocean. Like lookouts from the bridge or forecandle we made efforts to identify their borderlines, structures and distinguishing elements. It sometimes occurred to us that it was an impossible undertaking, because the intermingling is an infinite process. Yet, we have stopped the time for a moment and immersed ourselves in these semantic streams. We have perceived the motionless picture of the unstoppable lexical evolution. So, we were able to present only a fragment of the whole maritime lexicon and demonstrate its structural relationship.

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Sažetak

SEMANTIČKI ODNOSI U POMORSKOJ TERMINOLOGIJI

Proučavanje semantike već dugo spada u područje raznih znanstvenika poput psihologa, filozofa i antropologa. Tek su odnedavno, u 20-om stoljeću, i lingvisti pokazali ozbiljan interes, pa smo tako postupno došli do spoznaje o lingvističkoj semantici. Ali ona se bavi samo s jednim aspektom značenja, odnosno, kako međuodnos riječi utječe na njihovo značenje. To je vjerojatno jedan od razloga da je lingvistički pristup bez opasnosti ograničen samo na teoretske aspekte općeg engleskog, ostavljajući postrani jezik specifičnih struka. To će reći, u većoj se mjeri moraju razmatrati koncepti i reference tehničke terminologije. Naš rad pokušava ispuniti ovu prazninu dajući semantičku strukturu pomorskog engleskog.

Ključne riječi: semantičko polje, leksem, semantički odnos, metafora i metonimija

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