

COMMON LANGUAGE /vs/ SPECIALIZED LANGUAGE IN THE MARITIME FIELD

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Abstract: A technical language comprises all the terms belonging to a trade or occupation. It has no particular grammatical or lexical structure other than that of the common language, but it contains a number of specialized lexical items used to designate concepts belonging to a particular field of activity. Although clearly monoreferential and unequivocal, the maritime language has been undoubtedly marked by the influence the common language has had upon it. The aim of the present paper is to illustrate how the two types of language, the common and the specialized, intertwine and complement each other. In this respect, we follow the movement between the maritime language and the common language in its dynamism and we illustrate the complex phenomenon of migration of the maritime terms and the way the maritime signified can be enriched within the common language or other specialized languages.

Keywords: specialized language, common language, maritime language, term, word

A technical language consists of all the terms belonging to a trade or occupation. It shares features of the common language, such as the grammatical and the lexical structures, but it also contains a number of specialized lexical items used to designate concepts belonging to a particular field of activity.

If the word is a component of language in general, an object of study for linguists, the term is primarily the component part of a field and only then of the language in general. Given the fact that the terms of a particular terminological system are bound together by conceptual relations outside the discourse[1] a word can become a term when a meaning independent of the variations induced by the context of usage is assigned to it.

Terms are lexical units linguistically specialized, attached to a field of knowledge, be it scientific, technical, social etc. Even though they share some common traits with the lexical units belonging to general language (i.e. the words), such as their form, their lexical-grammatical patterns, their semantics etc., the terms have, as centre of interest, the concept which can be represented independently of the denomination[2].

Among those who have adopted some of the traditional principles, we mention J.C. Sager, who seems to confirm what E. Wüster said, namely that terminology reflects the conceptual structure of a field, that the reference of each lexical unit is restricted to that specific field [3] and that the terms are conventionally established [4]. J.C. Sager believes that the vocabulary of a language consists of specific reference items and general reference items, namely *terms* and *words* [5]. The latter are not specific to any discipline, and their referential properties are vague and general. Terms are different from words in the sense that they belong to a discipline, their totality forming the terminology of that discipline.

H. Felber, partisan of the traditional theory, defines three types of linguistic symbols [6]:

1. *The word*, which can have a variety of meanings, undefined meanings and shades of meanings. In this case, the specific meaning of a word depends on the context.

2. *The term*, linguistic symbol assigned to a concept, has a definite meaning. The concept represented by the term is conditioned by the position it occupies in a conceptual system [7].

3. To these two types of linguistic symbols, Felber added a third, the *thesaurus word* used for indexing and retrieving information in the information systems.

For H. Felber, the concept of a term results from the position of the concept within a given conceptual system. In this regard, Felber's theory resembles that of E. Wüster, according to which the concepts within a conceptual system can be defined in terms of the similarities and the differences between them.

Unlike the classical theory, more modern approaches believe that, in essence, terms have a concrete social existence, as a functional class of lexical items [8] which acts during the communicative activity. C. J. Sager, D. Dungworth and P.F. McDonald believe that terms and words are delimited according to the importance attributed to the phenomenon of lexicalisation: "*The question of lexicalisation, so very elusive in general language, and therefore often put aside in linguistic analysis, is fundamental to the description of special languages.*" [9]

In other words, when terminology is the object of the research, the problem of lexicalisation, or more accurately the problem of terminologisation should be considered essential; however when the research focuses on the word, the problem of lexicalisation should not be regarded as essential.

As far as the specialized discourse is concerned, it is believed that some meanings of the lexical units are strengthened by clarifying and increasing the level of specification required by the field to which the lexical units are applied. Thus, the lexical units become the terms of a domain. The distinction words - terms is therefore not a rigid one. According to J.C. Sager, sometimes non-specialists may consider a word to be a term, even if it is not one for the specialists. It may also happen that specialists use terms that the laymen regard as words from the general language. Furthermore, the possibility that many lexical units function both as terms and as words could even be a matter of choice and individual interpretation of the speaker and the receiver.

Moreover, words and terms interact and intersect constantly because they compete for the same linguistic forms. Terms are functional variants of words. At a formal level, terms are indistinguishable from words because the category of terms itself is not formally consolidated. We can even consider that, from a formal point of view, terms are words [10]. For example, many words and phrases from the fields of navigation and aeronautics belong to several levels of specificity. Although strongly related to the professionals of these fields, these linguistic items came into common use, thus belonging to an area of colloquial speech. For example, *a ridica ancora*, *a ridica pânzele* ("to leave"), *a-și pierde busola* ("to remain confused, to lose the sense of reality") etc. To a more cultivated area belong items such as: *a aborda* (originally "to join another ship"), *a eșua* ("to be stuck in a place where the water is shallow"), *a fi în derivă* ("to float with the tide") etc [11]. Based on the similarities and differences between terms and words we can expand the distinction to the common language and the specialized language. The followers of the classical notion of terminology believe it is absolutely necessary to make a clear distinction between common language and

specialized language [12]. Unlike general language where the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign is accepted, specialized languages aspire to systematic principles for designating and naming concepts according to certain predefined laws and general principles [13]. As already mentioned, in the classical theory, words are lexical units which belong to the general level of communication, i.e. the standard language, while the terms are “*recognizable units in the small frame of a field of knowledge or human activity* [14].” They appear in a specialised communication situation, and are used by subjects belonging to a well-defined area of socio-professional activity.

However, if the traditionalists made a clear cut distinction between common language and specialized language, in time, alternative models in the definition of scientific terms are allowed, and therefore the definition of the specialized language alters as well.[15] For L. Depecker, for example, the specialized language is a component of the general language or a continuation of it.[16] In addition, M.T. Cabré believes that we cannot make clear-cut distinction between terms and words, or between the specialized and the general communication as scientific knowledge is neither uniform nor totally separated from general knowledge,[17] a point of view shared by many theorists. Moreover, it is thought that between the specialized language and the common language there is a constant interaction and intersection,[18] the barriers between the two being not always very strictly marked. This fact is demonstrated by the presence of both lexical-semantic categories in the general explanatory dictionaries, as well as by the mutual transfers of terms that occur between the two types of language. An unambiguous definition of the specialized language is given by J.C. Sager, D. Dungworth and P.F. McDonald, who believe that the specialized languages are complex semiotic systems, semi-autonomous, based and derived from common everyday language, the difference between the two types of language being that the use of specialized languages involves the education of those who use them, and the fact that they are restricted to the use of the specialists.[19]

Most specialized languages are based on the common language. The scientific vocabulary is thought to attract the common items of vocabulary through specialization, and the concrete expressive images through transfer (metaphorical or metonymic); it borrows and it gives back, by means of expansion from and to other lexical areas, terms and technical specialized forms, which can be subject to other specialisation or to a new metaphorical transfer[20]. In turn, the specialized languages influence the common language, which appropriates the terms of the specialized fields [21]. This phenomenon is even more obvious today when science

and technology increasingly influence everyday life through the popularization of scientific and technical knowledge. There are many common words, which are assigned special meanings, thus acquiring the status of terms. For L. Hoffman, specialized language is a set of linguistic items that occur in a precise sphere of communication, and is limited by topic, intent and other specific conditions [22].

Speaking about the maritime language, we can easily see that some terms commonly used in treaties and seamanship manuals belong to the common language. These terms seldom even have a special meaning to justify their inclusion in the technical vocabulary. These words may or may not be assigned to the maritime field only by contextualization, because they belong to everyday language in certain situations and the maritime language in other situations. Consequently, at the basis of the lexical-semantic classification of terms we find the criterion of lexical meaning of the word *term* and therefore distinguish between two broad categories of terms: primary terms (term-words) and secondary terms (words-nonterms). The lexical-semantic value of primary terms is strictly professional, specialized, eg.: *bocaport, teugă, dunetă, cuplu maistru* etc. Secondary terms are taken from the basic word stock, where they have other lexical meanings, eg: *cap, gură, picior* etc., and which, once employed in maritime terminology, become maritime terms: *cap de bulgar* (“type of knot”), *gură de magazie* (“opening in the main deck”), *picior de câine* (“knot for shortening a rope”) etc. As far as we are concerned, we believe that the first condition for a scientific terminology to meet its goal is accuracy. In a time when access to science influences the progress of a civilization, the precision of scientific terminology is absolutely necessary and prompts scientists to adopt it in order to facilitate such access. To sum up, the maritime language is in many respects monoreferential and unequivocal, otherwise it would lose its specificity, but we cannot deny the influence the common language has had upon it. Indeed, owing to the contact with the common language the maritime language is also marked by semantic changes that can cause ambiguity (e.g. the verb *a aborda*). We agree, at this point, with the A. Toma's view, which solves many theoretical problems by means of “grading” the scientific meaning. We therefore notice that there are different levels of specificity, some terms being more liable to become terms than others.

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