



LANGUAGE UNITY, CULTURAL DIVERSITY. A DIACHRONIC PERSPECTIVE ON BRITISH MILITARY TERMINOLOGY CORPUS

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Abstract: *This paper intends to constitute a new step in studying British English, language spoken within the military environment. To better understand how the English language evolved, and especially the English military terms, we have to take an inner look, so as to find out more about the English and their identity. The approach of identifying the evolution of military terminology is difficult because language plays a decisive role in influencing culture, and culture shapes language. From this inter-conditioning results, on the one hand, the failure to account for the entire restoration of the whole, taking into consideration two dynamic variables. However, analyzing inter-conditioning in depth, we find, on the one hand, that language represents the basis of culture (at the dawn of culture and language, for a population living warlike times, it is natural that military terminology to fundamentally influence the development of culture), on the other hand, language is a form of culture expression, ensuring its spread, flow, transfer of signs and cultural codes. This second, auto referential or meta-communicative dimension, is somewhat aware of what is happening in the depths of language and culture. To study, for example, the linguistic etymology of military terms would mean to consider only a rather insignificant part, a static one, despite the diachronic perspective, in terms of terminology. To study the linguistic terminology means to plunge into the study of culture, parallel to the study of language, in order to penetrate deep into the denotative meanings, into connotations and myths resulting from here. The study of linguistic terminology overlaps the study of linguistic architecture.*

Keywords: *British military terminology, diachronic perspective, linguistics*

1. INTRODUCTION

The present paper may contribute to a better understanding of how language functions in different geographic combat areas, especially in U.K. and the U.S.A. and can be also a good tool of better learning and understanding the English for military purposes. Why do we really care about etymology of English military words and terminology? Practice has proved that the joint activities of military communication through international languages is not the best, the language of all military regulations and guidelines being the only one understood by all soldiers in a certain theatre of operations, in our case, the American English. But the English usages differ from one country to another due to different linguistic backgrounds

of military personnel. These language differences can cause confusion which may lead to misunderstanding of task fulfillment and, implicitly, to death. Furthermore, another question should be brought into discussion when dealing with the relevance of the topic approached in this research paper, i.e. whether the socio-cultural and socio-historical development of a society may influence the evolution of more numerous and differentiated military terms relating to activities that are deemed central to functioning of the society. It surely does and this issue is to be further tackled. In this respect, a good example that is worth mentioning is that of agrarian societies that would develop many terms that become more specific and differentiated relating to the soil, weather and farming conditions. For example the Inuit people (a group of culturally

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similar indigenous people inhabiting the Arctic regions of Greenland, Canada, the United States and Russia, also called Eskimo by the Americans) have more than 20 different terms for “snow” because of the importance of frozen precipitation to their survival and culture. By this logic, the relative importance of military activity and warfare would predict or suggest the differentiation and variety of terms relating to armaments, combat and military strategy. A farming society may only have terms for a fireman as a “gun”, where the object is used only for hunting and extreme situations of self-defense. In contrast, a militaristic society would more likely have developed terms for side arms, rifles, carbines, repeating or semi-automatic weapons, etc. These differentiated terms may simply be termed “guns” in a society to which sophisticated weaponry is less central. Cultural intersection and trade will result in awareness and some knowledge of the different types of weapons, in the above example. However, the full range of terminology may or may not be engrafted into the second language. The object may be seen as different, but may not be “named” or referred to as different because the cultural significance does not attach the same importance to differentiation.

In a crude example, a command may be given: “take the point!” In a non-militaristic context, this might be interpreted as to grasp an understanding of something communicated. In a sophisticated militaristic context, it would readily be understood as a direction to assume the lead position in an assault team effort. This merely illustrates how military term may or may not be “obvious” to someone who has acquired the language of reference as a second language, depending upon the cultural background and linguistic context of the person.

Therefore, we should go back and look at how the differentiation in terminology developed may provide basis for understanding why different terms are used. It may also signal how and why personnel in joint operations who come from a different linguistic background may not grasp the

nuances of language and terminology that practiced users of the terminology find “obvious”. Furthermore, after all these issues are dealt with, certain solutions will be provided.

Through the issues tackled, this paper intends to constitute a new step in studying and learning British and American English, languages spoken within the military environment, with respect to the different socio-cultural backgrounds and to the worldwide military personnel that needs to learn and use it properly. To better understand how the English language evolved, and especially the English military terms, we have to take an inner look, so as to find out more about the English and their identity. The best way to start such a study is the historical approach to studying the English language. Another reason to start the research on the military English terms historically is because the irregularities of the English language today are remains of earlier, quite regular patterns that can be easily explained diachronically.

2. TERMINOLOGY AS A SCIENTIFIC DISCIPLINE

Terminology is the discipline concerned with the study and compilation of specialized terms. In recent decades it has been developed, with full consideration of its principles, bases and methodology. Terminology began to take shape in the 1930s and nowadays it has a real scientific approach (Cabre, 1999:1). According to *The Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* a term is defined as: *a word or expression that has a particular meaning or is used in a particular activity, job, and profession*. A military term, thus, designates any word related to the military domain.

Terms are special category of words denoting scientific and technical notions, connected with man’s activity in different specialized domains of science and technique, in our case, in the military field. Their totality is defined as terminology. Terminology deals with the study of terms, their meaning,

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evolution and usage. In linguistics, the definition of “military term” and “military terminology” falls under the same parameters, the scientific concept of “term” and “terminology”, being almost identical. The military term is the same word (or combination of words) that names a concept of an object, process or action of the professional field, that is, from the military one. Thus, military terminology means all the military terms from one language or all languages. The military term is a symbol of a concept and its concept represents the concept of terminological meaning. Military terms differ substantially from a word usually expressed as it denotes a specific notion that does not lose the lexical-semantic integrity, regardless the processes of expressing the content of that notion. However, according to the structural viewpoint, the military term should be a single, independent nominal unit, unalterable in this respect. When it comes to evolution we usually refer to history and any history can be written only by making use of language. The other way round, language itself represents a deposit of history. Thus, to study the evolution of a language implies, first of all, a research of its evolution, its characteristics, the way in which it has enriched its vocabulary and the factors that influenced it.

The language of the military in general and of warfare in particular, has greatly impacted the English language. In recent years, numerous dictionaries have been compiled in the attempt to determine and record the often ephemeral vocabulary associated with specific wars—not only weapons terminology and technical jargon, but also the slang that inevitably characterizes every warzone.

In order to study the evolution of English language and implicitly of its military terms, we have to go back to its origins. The military language is very productive and in a continuous change when it comes to particular terms used in a specific country. Thus, war and violence have both played a major part in shaping the destiny of Britain. Although no invader succeeded in invading the British Isles since 1066, this did not immunize them. For

example, the major means of defense has always been the task of the Navy. With such a rich military heritage, great captains of war abound in every period. The physical skills and abilities of Alfred or Richard I are compared with the skilful touch of tacticians like Marlborough and Wellington. From Tudor times Britain’s admirals and captains ruled the high seas, suffering few reverses. Rank, discipline, pay, regimental structure, tactics and weaponry belong to the military system and, together with them; uniforms have fulfilled many functions in the past. They have provided protection and a means of identification in the very heat of battle. At sea the canvas bell bottoms of the ordinary seamen were simple and functional, while in the army perhaps uniforms also reflected glamour, pride and decoration.

The evolution of English language may be understood as a result of different historical factors and influences that led inevitably to the development of language, with certain quantitative and qualitative changes (from grammatical ones to changes in meaning).

British military terminology linguistic approach in parallel with the American military terminology is determined by the desire to make a presentation and description of multidimensional military terminology systems, the British and American languages, in terms of structuralism, semantics and etymology, without neglecting the historical context in which the terms have emerged and evolved.

3. A DIACHRONIC APPROACH TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH MILITARY TERMINOLOGY

The diachronic analysis of language (or of its functional block) is the analysis of transformations and changes to which language is subject to. Furthermore, as Coşeriu considers (1996:69-70), the diachronic analysis involves the analysis of "making", of continuously creating language, as change does not lie within the natural order of transformations, according to fixed laws, but

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along with the creative freedom, of conventional transformation:

“We have, in addition, within the culture sciences, a particular power that no natural science has and which they do not need. Namely, we can see how freedom and people change laws of their own activities. And this does not exist in nature sciences. Therefore culture sciences are much deeper and much harder than nature sciences. Because here we have two options, not one: we have law enforcement in the particular case, as in natural laws and enforcement of freedom norms applied to laws change”.

The diachronic perspective aims at establishing the ways and conditions under which linguistic transformations could take place. Given the previous view, that linguistic “transformation” means “making” language, under the creative freedom of community members, the diachronic perspective involves analyzing the conditions under which linguistic freedom made possible the renewal of language. In terms of needs (social ones) of the linguistic community members, the diachronic perspective aims at how language adapts to the speakers’ needs of expression, at the conditions of acceptance and dissemination through appeal to freedom of expression, to integration of linguistic creation into the community cultural tradition. Therefore, the diachronic perspective should not be understood as an analysis perspective in the spirit of the laws of nature, possibly to be researched through purely quantitative methods, but as the reconstruction of an entire language-culture dynamics through the motivation attempt or justification of changes, of identifying the reason that led to change, reasoning that includes the conditions, circumstances, context and that cannot be confused with the cause.

The diachronic perspective approach in our study is fundamental, because, naturally, a language is learned not to use signs and the relations between signs properly but to actually create into that particular language. Therefore, we don’t not learn what we already

know but the language opportunities, what may be developed, what potentially can be said. From such a perspective, understanding the diachronic development of English in general, and of military terminology in particular, should be considered in accordance with the possibilities of this terminology development and, possibly, of convergences into an idiom or into a specialized language, unanimously acquired within a political and military alliance. It’s equally necessary to view language as a living being, in the process of its becoming, because language requires continuous adaptation to its use which, in turn, means continuous adaptation to the life situations of a dynamic community. In terms of knowledge it is important to note that there are at least three levels (different ones) to achieve it: *doxa*, or unreliable and subjective opinion, *téchne*, or science action (doing something that needs to be justified), respectively *episteme*, i.e., science justified by experience and study. Normally, language study involves placing it at the level of *téchne*, in Coşeriu’s terms (cited Saramandu, 1996:14), i.e., to know how to do (to speak) which leads Coseriu’s post-Saussure perspective closer to pragmatism. In such a direction we can speak of language as social institution, which corresponds to the norm in Hjelmslev’s terms, that is, it can be imposed as a commitment rather than compulsion, both being forms of obligation in terms of linguistic conventions. Therefore, the diachronic perspective does not imply only the level of linguistic facts already accomplished at the level of English in the United Kingdom and North America but also the level of open structures and of distinctions made within language that imply an agreement with the above mentioned facts. Our perspective can be useful, within terminology limits inclusively to distinguish, in a subtle manner, the elements that concern particular aspects of general linguistics of dialectological, socio-linguistic nature, of language stylistics, etc. This foundation, resonates with Coşeriu’s perspective, according to which plans subjected to analysis would be language in

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general, language and speech, which would give an account of how Anglo-Saxon military terminology was able to develop into such a differentiated manner:

As the difference between the three plans: language in general, language and speech – to which the linguistic speech, language and linguistics and the linguistic discourse or text correspond to – in the same way, in addition to studying homogeneity discipline (e.g. structural grammar, lexicology general structural or structural description), we must have disciplines that study the variety, this other dimension of language. And then, we have the discipline that studies the variety of space, that is well built, dialectology at all levels; then sociolinguistics, that should distinguish the difference between social and cultural classes; and stylistic language, that studies these diaphasic differences in all areas of language, but very much in the vocabulary, where we often need this indexing of words, i.e.: it is related to the search level, to a certain language style, and so on and so forth. (Coşeriu, apud Saramandu, 1996:24-25).

Intending to study variations in Anglo-Saxon military terminology in particular (the English in general), as compared to what functional language represents, which is a unitary, syntopic (i.e. which does not differ in nature space), synstratic (not socio-cultural differences), respectively symphasic (which is done in a single style of language), we take into account the fact that linguistic variations in the Anglo-Saxon military terminology can be made towards a hypothetical structure terminology derived from functional language, i.e. as compared to the terminological structure within a single dialect, language level and style of a single language.

The diachronic analysis needs to be completed by the diatopic, diaphasic and diastratic analysis so as to provide a multidimensional perception of a phenomenon that requires a simple change of some terms in time (belonging to military corpus) according to purely chronological criteria. In other words, our analysis refers to linguistic change that involves considering at least two distinct

stages: innovation and adoption. If innovation can be regarded as individual phenomenon, from a linguistic perspective it is rather an innovation at the Convention level and requires a strict relationship with the spread of innovation effects. Therefore, we speak of a chain of events that causes linguistic change, based on innovation (to mean that any major work that decisively influences the further development of literature and thus the language speech community in question) continued with the spread of its effects, with selection of phenomena worthy of consideration and with the adoption within the limits of language habituses. Generally, in linguistic terms, the study of linguistic change involves comparison with a common initial phase, often etymologically reconstructed, without documents proving the presence of certain elements of terminology / language within the language areal in question, common phase which involves reporting to a period of common living, in terms of language and not necessarily in terms of community. The language development is relevant parallel different linguistic communities, i.e., the same language there are already separate communities, the differences are minor, and rather the kind of diatopic, diastratic or possibly diaphasic analysis. The parallel language development is relevant within different linguistic communities, i.e., the same language may exist in already separated communities, the differences being minor, and rather of a diastratic or possibly diaphasic type of analysis. There is also the perspective according to which linguistic change, as a phenomenon in its own right that requires a sharp change in language at some point, does not exist anymore. But this perspective involves understanding each and every linguistic fact as a continuous reality. In this case, linguistic change aims at a rather organic understanding of continuous transformation of the linguistic system by continuous partial replacements. These facts already existed and were rebuilt in the same direction, along with facts that are replaced without the change of the entire system to be majorly influenced.

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Therefore, we talk about organic continuity, language can be analyzed as a body equal to itself, while terminology, focusing on specialized language features, requires the other way of understanding of linguistic change, namely, in the sense of language change as achievement in leaps. In other words, the analysis of Anglo-Saxon military terminology mechanism can be achieved in digital manner, studying the syncopated change of terminology structures, in the attempt to restore a route of transformations, or in analytical manner, through language as an organic structure, able to realize what continuous change means, continuous dynamics, the phenomenon of language occurrence, of originating into the fact that something always turns into language, namely, that it is done through change and continuity.

Therefore, language dynamics can be seen as real, on the one hand, related to the dynamics changes within some classical terminology structures or, can be regarded as an illusion of change, when dynamism is not directed by certain vectors, by certain tendencies, language itself representing an objectifying, something abstract, while the vectors of change are only language speakers. The strict linguistic analysis of English terminology mutations in the field of language is unable to meet the requirements of completeness of research of such a manner, the study of community history, cultural history, of individuals and groups of individuals becoming being equally essential, which represents the foundation of the linguistic community in question.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The identification of military terminology development is difficult because language has a major role in influencing culture, and culture shapes language. From this interconditioning, the impossibility to recover the whole results, taking into account two entire dynamic variables. But, analyzing it in depth, we find,

on the one hand, that language is the culture (at the dawn of culture and language, for a population living under war time, it is natural for military terminology to have fundamentally influenced the development of culture), on the other hand language is a form of culture expression, ensuring its transmission, flow, transfer of cultural signs and codes. This second self-referential dimension, or metacommunication, is somehow aware of what happens in the depths of language and culture.

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