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Techniques of Shortening in Maritime English

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Abstract: This study aims to offer a classification of shortened terms and terminological phrases in Maritime English using the lexico-semantic method. It is based on examples excerpted from learning materials designed for cadets and students of Navigation at Varna Naval Academy, all of them compiled in the Learner's English-Bulgarian Maritime Dictionary and forming a large corpus representative of the domain they are used in. Shortening here is chosen as an umbrella term for initialisms, acronyms, clippings and blends. The topic is worth discussing because it reveals techniques of shortening in maritime English thereby raising learners' awareness to a variety of English they are going to face in their future work in a multinational environment.

Keywords: shortening, classification, clipping, blending, abbreviation

1. Theoretical Background

Shortening of terms and terminological phrases as a pattern of term formation has been an object of research of many scholars but the process itself is referred to in different ways by them. The typology offered of short forms also differs to some extent. The purpose of this paper is to offer a classification of shortened terms and terminological phrases in Maritime English (ME) using the lexico-semantic method. The examples discussed are excerpted from learning materials designed for cadets and students of Navigation at Varna Naval Academy, all of them compiled in the Learner's English-Bulgarian Maritime Dictionary (Velikova, Toncheva, 2009) The corpus itself consists of 5370 instances and is therefore authentic and representative of the domain they are used in. The study also focuses on the techniques compressed terms are formed by which will raise learners' awareness to a variety of English they are going to face in their future work in a multinational environment.

It should be noted that the tendency towards shortening and abbreviation is a process characteristic of language as a whole. However, it largely pervades special languages and ME terminology in particular, as well. Shortened forms ensure communication not only through economy of effort but also by condensing information and enhancing the information value of certain linguistic units. Besides, they represent a special category of synonym which assumes a particular importance in special languages (Sager 1990).

There are several factors to be considered when discussing abbreviations and shortenings. Their emergence has been boosted by the large number of multi-word terms. According to Brunt it is the length of names (and terms) and the principle of linguistic economy that has made the use of abbreviations essential both in theory and practice (Brunt, 1999). Moreover, it is through compression in vocabulary that economy in texts is mainly achieved (Sager, 1990). In ME, however, abbreviations are abundant also for economy of time, especially in written communication. For example, in telegram and telex writing there are no clear-cut rules but any short words may be left out – articles or prepositions, while the rest may be blended, altered, abbreviated, which in combination with other abbreviated forms, makes the texts produced unintelligible for landlubbers. Traces of this can still be noticed in today's exchange of information.

Overall, linguists use various hypernyms to group 'initialisms', 'acronyms', 'clippings' and 'blends' together. Danilenko calls the "structure for naming one and the same concept with the same meaning but shortened by means of definite linguistic processes" lexical shortening (Danilenko, 1977). Sager regards them as a form of compression (Sager, 1990). According to Quirk et al. the proper term for shortening of words is abbreviation which is involved in English word-formation through acronymy, clipping and blending (Quirk et

al, 1985). McArthur uses the same term to describe what he calls the fastest growing language in the world (McArthur, 1988). Bulgarian linguists have also adopted it to describe "the formation of new words by combining initial sounds or letters or shortened parts of complex phrases" (Simeonova, 2016). I will use the umbrella term 'shortening' for initialisms, acronyms, clippings and blends in this study in order to distinguish it from the large group of abbreviations in the corpus. I will also leave univerbization aside as a subtype of shortening.

2. Techniques of Shortening Used in Maritime English

2.1 Shortening Resulting from Clipping

Clipping is defined as "the reduction of a word to one of its parts" by Marchand (1969). According to Sager (1990) it is a frequent and highly productive method in which syllables or letters are omitted from any part of the word. Fandrych holds that clippings move to different registers or styles as compared to their long equivalents (Fandrych, 2008). This is why most scholars claim that clipped forms are more often met in professional slang than in regular terms. The process occurs after dropping the initial, medial or final part of a word. For example, initial clipping is observed in *copter < helicopter; plane < airplane* and final clipping – in *gas < gasoline; prop < prope*ller. Medial clipping is rare as in *fo'c'sle < forecastle* and *bosun < boatswain*.

The corpus records two classes of clipped forms in terminological phrases as well. The former refers to clipping the final part and preserving and combining the initial parts of the words, e.g. *MAREP < Mariner Reporting System; SATCOM < satellite communications; COLREG < Collision Regulations*, etc. In the latter only one of the words is clipped and the other is preserved, e.g. *NAVAIDS < Navigational Aids; NAVAREA < Navigational Area* or *Fog Det < Fog Detector Light* where the third component is omitted. However, these are borderline cases and can also serve for illustrating patterns of blending.

2.2 Shortening Resulting from Blending

Together with other forms of compression blending has been pervasive in the English language of the late 20th and early 21st centuries and imparts colour not only to specialized but also to general English.

Plag describes blends as "words that combine two (rarely three or more) words into one, deleting material from one or both of the source words." (Plag, 2003). Consequently blending involves the shortening of two words and then compounding them. Fandrych emphasizes that "blends derive their meanings from the two underlying words from the parts of which they were formed, but, unlike compounds, they show an additional semantic component", therefore very often they are "consciously composed" (Fandrych, 2008).

In order to describe the findings in the corpus we are going to apply the blending rule formulated by Plag (2003) with A, B, C and D, referring to the respective parts of the elements involved. According to it we can identify the following classes of blends in ME terminology:

1. AB + CD → AC – *information request → INREQ; hazardous material → hazmat; casualty evacuation → casevac*

2. AB + CD → AD – *transmitter + receiver → transceiver; boom + hoist → boost; floating hotel → floatel; collapsible container → coltainer*

3. AB + CD → ACD – *merchant ship → mership; radar dome → radome; discharging port → disport*

4. AB + CD → ABC – *self-discharging → selfd; ship position reporting system → shippos*

5. AB + CD → ABD – *bulk container → bulktainer, tank container → tanktainer; sea airplane → seaplane.*

There are two other classes based on three elements such as

6. AB + CD + EF → ACE – *International Maritime Satellite Organization → INMARSAT*

7. AB + CD + EF → AF – *radar transponder beacon → racon*

where at least one of the elements is omitted. Minor spelling, phonetic, morphological, or grammar changes may also be observed in all examples pointed in this study as well as complete deletion of one of the components.

2.3. Shortening Resulting from Abbreviation

Scholars treat abbreviations in two different ways – either as a technique of word-formation, or as "a special category of synonym which assumes a particular importance in special languages" (Sager, 1990). They are similar in nature to blends, because both blends and abbreviations are amalgamations of parts of different words (Plag, 2002). They are numerous in ME and extensively used in practice. Besides, the classifications offered also differ depending on the principle selected.

Starting with the standard ISO 704: 2009, which establishes the basic principles and methods for preparing and compiling terminologies, it points out four basic types of abbreviated forms: clipped terms, abbreviations, initialisms and acronyms (ISO 704, 2009). Medina (2004) distinguishes four main types of abbreviations from a morphological point of view: simple abbreviations, clipped words, blends and complex abbreviations. Simple abbreviations are those formed by taking just the initial or any other letter from a group of words, e.g. *ARCC – Aeronautical Rescue Coordination Centre, ASD – Admiralty Sailing Directions*, etc. Complex abbreviations combine two or more simple abbreviations through several typographic symbols, such as a hyphen, slash, etc., e.g. *B/H – Bill of Health, Bo-Ro – Bulk, Oil and Ro-Ro Carrier, c.i.f. & e. – cost, insurance, freight & exchange*. However, this classification leaves individual terms and their short forms aside.

Plag groups abbreviations depending on orthographic and phonological properties (Plag, 2002). They can be either spelled in capital or in small letters, and they can be either pronounced by naming each individual letter (so-called initialisms), e.g. *CMG – Course Made Good, FSC – Flag State Control*, etc., or by applying regular reading rules (so-called acronyms), for instance *DOC – Document of Compliance, SHEX – Sundays and Holidays Excluded,* etc.

McArthur builds his classification on pronounceability (1988) distinguishing between initialisms, acronyms and clipped forms. Further on, he makes a distinction between unpronounceable and semi-pronounceable types of initialisms. Compare for example *ETD – Estimated Time of Departure [i: ti: di:]* to *DTG – Date Time Group [di: ti: dʒi:]*. Acronyms are grouped into pronounceable, mimicking a word and intentional homonyms as in *SOPEP [sopep] – Shipboard Oil Pollution Emergency Plan, FAST – Fleet Anti-Terrorist Security Team [fa:st}* and *NAIADES [naɪəˈdi:z] – Navigation and Inland Waterway Action and Development in Europe*. The latter example is probably named after the Naiads – river nymphs in Greek mythology. *NAVTEX – Navigational Telex* can serve as an example of a syllabic acronym.

Although this classification highlights pronunciation which is an essential feature of abbreviations, the distinctions it makes are somewhat fuzzy and it does not include types of abbreviations which are common in ME terminology. The same holds true for the two classifications discussed previously.

I am going to apply a classification based on the corpus which outlines a number of subclasses depending on the techniques of shortening as well as the areas where they are used.

3. Classification of Shortened Forms based on Techniques Used

1. **Initialisms** have already been discussed here. In them only the initial letters of words, or sometimes initial syllables, are "put together and used as words" (Adams, 1973). There are two types of initialisms: acronyms and alphabetisms. Those pronounced as single words are referred to as acronyms, e.g. *LO/LO - Lift-on/Lift-off, EPIRB – Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon, ECDIS – Electronic Chart Display and Information System,* etc. Alphabetisms are always pronounced letter by letter, e.g. *DBEATS - Dispatch Payable Both Ends on All Time Saved, ATT – Admiralty Time Tables, BBB – Before Breaking Bulk.* Sometimes a word may be left out but the choice which one it should be is arbitrary, e.g. *STCW – International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers.*

2. Another group of abbreviated multi-word terms is a **combination of numbers and letters**, e.g. *A1A – Continuous Wave Telegraphy, Morse Code, R3E – Telephony Using Amplitude Modulation: Single Sideband, Reduced Carrier, H+24 – Continuous*, etc.

3. **Single words** may be abbreviated in a number of ways:

   a. by leaving vowels out most frequently met in a written form – *cgo – cargo, frt – freight, hdlg – handling, scty – security*, etc.

   b. if the initial letter is a vowel, it is included in the short form – *enqry – enquiry, abdnt – abandonment, acct – account, obstn – obstruction*, etc.

   c. by keeping the first syllable in the word – *road – roadstead, aero – aeronautical, al – algae, alt – altitude*, etc.

d. by keeping the first syllable or part of it and the last letter – *recvd – received, bgd – bagged, shpg – shipping, mld – molded*, etc.

e. by keeping the prefix intact – *unco – uncovers, unexam – unexamined, redely – redelivery; irresp – irrespectiv*e, etc.

This type of shortening does not have its own distinctive pronunciation but is either spelled with capital letters or with lower-case letters. In Bulgarian this process is uncommon – if it occurs, it is occasional and probably a result of previous understanding between users.

A good point to consider is that there may be two or more abbreviations of a term, for instance *vsl, ves, V – vessel, sta, stn – station, pos, psn, posn – position, P & I, PANDI - Protection and Indemnity Club*. Besides, homonymy is pervasive with abbreviations, Thus *ltr* may be interpreted as either a *letter* or *litres, OT* may mean *overtime* or *on truck*. Actually sometimes an abbreviation may give rise to various readings, e.g. *m* may stand for *1.medium, 2.metres, 3.minute, 4.mass, 5.midship, 6.month.*

4. **Hybrid abbreviations** which combine two or more ways of shortening may also be considered here. They are usually combinations of abbreviated and blended elements as in *Search and Rescue Satellite Tracking – SARSAT.* The opposite process may also be observed as in *LORAN – Long Range Navigation* where the first elements are clipped while the last one is abbreviated as an initialism. In *INTERTANCO – International Association of Independent Tanker Owners* only three of the terms are subject to shortening, the first and the last but one are clipped, while the last one is reduced to an initial, the other two elements being left out. *BO-RO –- Bulk, Oil and Roll-on/Roll off* is a combination of the two techniques again – abbreviation and a clipped form of another acronym. *DAMFORDET – Damages for Detention* on the other hand is a kind of abbreviation not quite condensed where the first and the last component are clipped but the preposition is kept in full. *SeaBee – Sea Barge Carrying Ship* seems not to belong to any of the classes described above because there is only one element abbreviated to an initial, the last two are omitted resulting in an easy to pronounce word.

4. Classification of Shortened Forms Based on Area of Application

From a thematic point of view abbreviations used in ME belong to different spheres:

a. Electronic communications where the so-called e-abbrev or netcronyms belong (McArthur, 2000)

b. Documentation fulfilment

c. Operations records

d. Graphical representation of routes, passage plans, etc.

e. Legal and contractual matters

f. International commerce

g. Insurance, etc.

Among these here are some of the most typical ones:

1. **Abbreviations and symbols in charts** are usually found in a written form and indicate specific seabed characteristics, dangers to navigation, lights, marks whether on land, at sea or in the air, aids to navigation and so on. Besides, they are displayed on all navigation equipment and systems on board and must be consistent and uniform in accordance with the Admiralty Nautical Publication 5011 – *rk – rock, so – soft, sf – stiff, sh – shell, sh – shoal, si – silt, Mon – Monument, Obs – Obstruction*, etc. (Velikova, 2018).

2. **Technical abbreviations** as units of measurement as well as mathematical symbols also fit in here – *kt - knot(s), nm - nautical miles, fm - fathom, mb – milibar, deg - degree*, etc.

3. **Abbreviations in contracts, shipping documents, certificates and cargo and package types** abound in the ME domain. INCOterms as well as chartering terms belong to this group, too, e.g. *CFR – COST AND FREIGHT, EXW – EX WORKS, B.N. – Booking Note, B/L – Bill of Lading, tcs – tierces, Bar – Barrel, ISGOTT – International Safety Guide for Oil Tankers and Terminals,* etc. In fact, all shipping documents, conventions and codes tend to have a full and short name form.

The examples given so far prove that the spelling of abbreviations differs: either with capital letters or with small letters, or a combination of both – *EmS – Emergency Schedule*, with superscripted or subscripted symbols - *Rem^{ble} – remarkable; C_w – Coefficient of the Waterplane Area,* with or without dots, the trend being not to use them any more.

5. Teaching and Practicing Shortened Forms

It is our duty to make English abbreviations part of our ESP syllabus wherever they logically fit. They shouldn't be connected with the students' level but rather be introduced step by step within the topics taught. Practice has shown that it is better to explain the mechanisms of getting a full form short rather than leave abbreviated forms obscure and unclear. It is obvious that students are already aware of the phenomenon because of their extensive use of electronic communications, so they should be encouraged to guess how words are compressed and why not create their own abbreviations.

Suitable activities in this respect may involve matching, differentiating, choosing a correct answer, combining full and short forms, even expanding the meaning of abbreviated terms or phrases.

6. Conclusions

"Abbrevomania or initialese" as described by McArthur in the end of the 20th century is truly the fastest growing language in the world. This study has explored types of shortening as an umbrella term for initialisms, acronyms, clippings, and blends with a large number of examples. It has proved that all of them are extensively used and not only in a written form. They have moved into the ME domain from different subject fields and are indicative of different communicative situations and genres.

In spite of the trend towards shortened forms very few English abbreviations have an accepted standardized abbreviation in Bulgarian. Usually the majority has an accepted translation equivalent and the abbreviation is either the English one or there is no abbreviated form at all. Since some of the above are still unspecified or non-standardized, the English abbreviation is preferred instead of creating a Bulgarian one.

Last but not least, it is essential for our students to know the techniques of shortening in maritime English because this will familiarize them with a variety of English they are going to cope with in their future work on board ship. It is even more critical for them to know and choose the correct forms – whether full or short, according to the type of communication they are going to be involved in.

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