

Polysemy in English Military Vocabulary

Yulia A. Talagaeva¹, Eugeny I. Chertkov²

^{1,2} Russian Air Force Military Educational and Scientific Center «Air Force Academy named after Professor N.E. Zhukovsky and Y.A. Gagarin»

Voronezh, Russia

^{1,2} talag-yulia@yandex.ru

Annotation. The article deals with the phenomenon of polysemy in the English military vocabulary. The role of polysemy in military terms development, as well as the difficulties that arise in course of translating multivalent words into Russian are described. The necessity of taking into account the specific nature of the field the term belongs to is underlined. It helps avoid the ambiguity of interpretation. The article studies the structure of military vocabulary and describes the ways of its enrichment by means of metaphor and metonymy.

Key words: polysemy, military vocabulary, term, the English Language, literary devices, vocabulary enrichment.

Полисемия в английской военной лексике

Юлия Александровна Талагаева¹, Евгений Игоревич Чертков²

^{1,2} Военный учебно-научный центр Военно-воздушных сил «Военно-воздушная академия имени профессора Н.Е. Жуковского и Ю.А. Гагарина»,

Воронеж, Россия

^{1,2} talag-yulia@yandex.ru

Аннотация: В статье рассматривается явление полисемии в английском языке на примере военной лексики. Описана роль полисемии в формировании военных терминов, а также трудности, возникающие при переводе многозначных слов на русский язык. Подчеркивается необходимость учета специфики той сферы деятельности, к которой относится термин, чтобы избежать двусмысленности его трактовки. Рассмотрена структура военной лексики, описаны способы ее обогащения при помощи таких стилистических средств, как метафора и метонимия.

Ключевые слова: полисемия, военная лексика, термин, английский язык, стилистические средства, обогащение лексики.

With the development of new fields of knowledge, possessing a conceptual apparatus of their own, new sets of terms and definitions arise. An important characteristic of a term is its uniqueness. That is, in a given field of knowledge, a particular term can denote only one object or phenomenon. However, when used in several areas, a word can have a different meaning in each, thus becoming multivalent. For example, the noun “range” means “combat radius” in the military sphere, “mountain ridge” in geology, “interval” in mathematics and physics, “areal” in agriculture.

In linguistics, polysemy implies that a word has at least two lexical meanings, historically conditioned or interrelated in denotation and origin. The exact meaning can be understood only from the context. Polysemy is inherent in most units of common vocabulary. According to L.K. Kondratyukova, the unambiguity of a term can only be traced within a single field of knowledge and in a certain context; the term always correlates with only one object [4, p. 281].

The attitude to polysemy in linguistics is ambiguous. Some researchers (D. S. Lotte, S. V. Grinev) consider polysemy unacceptable if one term denotes two closely related concepts. Terms should be characterized by definiteness, precision of meaning, contextual independence, stability and repeatability, nominative and stylistic neutrality [2, p. 30]. E. L. Boyarskaya believes that multiple meanings, on the one hand,

arise from the nature of language, and on the other hand, they reflect how our consciousness works. Almost any word in the language has enough potential to develop meanings denoting different concepts [2, p. 19].

Polysemy often complicates the translation of military texts from English into Russian. This becomes obvious when one has to translate texts on specific very narrow topics. The meanings of multivalent words in common and special vocabularies sometimes differ incredibly. For example, “button” in common lexis means translated as “a small disc or knob sewn on to a garment and used to fasten it”. In IT and programming the same word means “a small device on a piece of electrical or electronic equipment which is pressed to operate it”, while in geophysics it means “a small disk electrode”. In military vocabulary “button” is either a noun denoting “a device on electronic equipment one presses to start an operation” or a verb meaning “prepare for combat”. Usually when multivalent words come into a highly specialized sphere of usage, such as military vocabulary, they lose all their meaning except for one and become unambiguous terms.

Military vocabulary covers all words and combinations denoting concepts directly related to the armed forces, war, military actions. These can be scientific and technical terms (“air-to-air missile”), common words used in relation to military objects and machinery (“wing” of airplane, bird or building), as well as expressions used almost exclusively in military environment, and unknown for most people (“sea daddy” – The Marine veteran) [5, p. 120].

English military vocabulary comprises two categories of words: military terminology and emotionally colored words. Military terminology is a formalized system of military terms that possess strictly defined meanings and have a clear scope of application and scientific justification [3, pp. 62-63]. V. N. Shevchuk defines military terminology as an ordered set of military terms reflecting the conceptual apparatus of military science and associated with the forms and methods of warfare, issues of strategic use of the armed forces, as well as operational and tactical use of troops, formations, units and subunits, with their organization, armament and technical

equipment [7, p. 97]. Military terminology reflects the variety of military concepts fixed by official documents, covering all branches of military affairs.

Emotionally colored elements of military vocabulary are stylistic synonyms of neutral military terms (for example, “pilot” (a term) and “flyboy”, “airborne cowboy”, “blue-suiter” (emotionally colored words that mean “pilot”).

There are different ways of military vocabulary enrichment, including the addition of new meanings to existing words. One of them is the transfer of qualities from one word to another via metaphor and metonymy. This type of polysemy is called lexical, as its grammatical form stays the same, only the meaning changes.

A metaphor is the transfer of a name from one object to another due to similarity of their secondary features. For example, “human nose” is a direct meaning, but “nose of missile” is a metaphor, since it denotes the front part of a missile, not a nose. The same is applied to the case (“body”) and back part (“tail”) of a missile.

Metonymy is the transfer of a name from one object to another based on real or imaginary connections between them. In this case, the same word can name a part and a whole, an object and its contents, an action and its result, etc. [1, p. 77]. For example, “grip” – the handle of a pistol is formed from the verb “to grip” that means “hold tight”, i.e. this is the part of the pistol that you need to hold tight. There was an action of “holding tight”, and now the same word is used to denote the part of the gun being held.

Metaphor is used for coining new meanings based on the following types of similarity:

1. Appearance and shape: body – 1) human body, 2) body (of a missile, aircraft); tail – 1) tail of an animal (located at lower point of the spine); 2) tail of a missile, aircraft (located at the back of the device); drum – 1) drum (musical instrument), 2) a round magazine case that looks like a drum.

2. The nature of the action: yawning – 1) yawing animal (looking for food); 2) angular movements of the aircraft, resembling the yawing movements of an animal.

3. Functions: hammer – 1) hammer (instrument used for battering down nails), 2) trigger hammer (a detail that hits the fulminate cap in a firearm);

4. Similarities in color: blue – 1) the blue color; 2) the blues – “friendly” troops during NATO exercises (wear blue uniform).

When new meanings are formed via metonymy, the transfer occurs not by similarity, but by associations. This phenomenon highlights the most prominent feature that replaces all other characteristics. The following variants of metonymy can be distinguished:

1. Action – doer: guard – a security person, trigger guard (of a pistol) – a metallic detail that encloses vertically the trigger of a firearm; to grip – hold tight, a grip – a handle of a shotgun.

2. Action – result: to recoil – to drawback; a recoil – backward movement of a weapon after a shot.

3. Place – action: home – a place where one lives in, come back to this place; to home – to aim at the target.

4. Feature – an object possessing this feature: round – a round form; a round – bullet (has rounded shape); technical – related to equipment; a technical – a military cross-country truck.

5. Action – place of action: to support – assist, a support – an outpost.

Also it is necessary to mention a tendency to “animate” weapons peculiar to military vocabulary. That is the behavior of a living being is attributed to weapons and military vehicles. When describing their operation, soldiers use metaphors such as “to sense/recognize/pursue/track the target”, “to demonstrate evasive action”, etc.

On the one hand, the polysemy caused by “animation” of equipment simplifies description of their operation. There is no need to pick up new terms, it is enough just to describe the action using common words. On the other hand, there is also a psychological component here: during military operations, the life of soldiers depends on the reliability of weaponry and equipment. Therefore, they are perceived not as tools, but as partners in military missions, and their actions are described with the help of words that denote behavior of living beings.

Thus, polysemy enriches military vocabulary and simplifies the process of coining new terms easier. It allows them to be used in different spheres of life for more

accurate denotation of objects and phenomena. In addition, due to the use of metaphor and metonymy for the formation of new meanings, it becomes easier to understand them, since new terms retain a semantic connection with the original concept. In general, the polysemy of terms is a manifestation of the natural laws of vocabulary development.

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Информация об авторах

Талагаева Юлия Александровна – кандидат филологических наук, доцент, старший преподаватель кафедры иностранных языков Военного учебно-научного центра Военно-воздушных сил «Военно-воздушная академия имени профессора Н.Е. Жуковского и Ю.А. Гагарина» (Воронеж, Россия), email: talag-yulia@yandex.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9519-958X>

Чертков Евгений Игоревич – курсант Военного учебно-научного центра Военно-воздушных сил «Военно-воздушная академия имени профессора Н.Е. Жуковского и Ю.А. Гагарина» (Воронеж, Россия), email: talag-yulia@yandex.ru.