

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN MILITARY TERMINOLOGY

Cosmina ROMAN

Faculty of Aeronautical Management, "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy, Brasov, Romania

Abstract: *Having the intention of a compared study of the English, British and American military terminology, it is necessary to understand the characteristics and place of this terminology in each of the two cultural areas covered by our analysis, i.e. how the mutual influence of specialized terminology is felt on the two terminological corpora. There is no complete dictionary and current of British, English and American military terminology, for such a dictionary is impossible to draft. If customary military terms, the expressions, including those in military slang are mutually translatable, once we bring into discussion different military structures and different habits, we cannot compare British military acronyms system with the American military ones. Furthermore, adding the recent international events, the trend towards globalization, the existence of NATO and the need for standardization in the use of English, the experience in the theatres and so on, with a equalizing and levelling role at the common language level, but that allows the creation of further ample openness to the world of slang terms, in what the system of abbreviations means, the picture of the current situation on terminological differences becomes more complex and almost impossible to clarify*

Keywords: *military lexis, terminological corpora, basic terminological units, language standardization.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In seeking an interdisciplinary approach to terminology, assuming a descriptive-linguistic approach to the detriment of traditional normative one and enough rigid to allow an understanding of the terminological corpus dynamics, thus starting from relations between military lexis (British and American) and common lexis, we chose to focus on the possibility of building mutual relations, of identification of certain relations from a synchronous perspective, but also of a future diachronic trend, of a projection of what the possibilities of terminology mutual influence may mean, of a possible stability and of the role of the levelling effect that military international linguistic standardization initiates. We propose a parallel analysis of British and American military terminology, as the most important influence occurred at this level, namely, after the influence of the experience of the WWII that fueled the distinctions between the two corpora.

2. BRITISH MILITARY TERMINOLOGY HANDBOOK

In this respect, we used as a reference, the paper *British Military Terminology* drafted by War Department of the U.S. Army Military Intelligence Service during the Second World War (1943). The manual is up-to-date because it contains items from the main developing sources of military terminology, including the experience of the Second World War. Built in order to emphasize the British military terms, unfamiliar to American military terminology, particularly with terms identical in form but different in meaning within the two cultural spaces, the manual responds to the need to reduce the uncertainty in the use of the same language, but also, the different terminological particularities within different cultural spaces.

The handbook allows a proper understanding, thorough and professional, assuming the highest degree of specialization (Cabré Castellví, 2000:29, *apud* Tomescu, 2008:23), equivalent to the specific discourse

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in the military environment itself, including highly specialized terms of the general lexis, but with some relevance regarding the specific environment, as well. Within this understanding of “internal” terminology as opposed to the external one, in discussing the lack of evasiveness, the clarity of specialized definition or at least equivalent (when necessary), between terms that belong to both terminological corpora, we notice a greater prescriptivity and normativity than trans-disciplinary approach usually and naturally imposes. Referring to military terminology from a collection of specialized terms, assuming a terminography of a domain not accessible to linguists who come from the exterior, and who try to build corpora by appealing to ‘external’ terminology, but which is accessible to me due to my double specialization¹, we have reached the conclusion that accurate understanding of military terminology sphere in English (taking into account both cultural spaces in parallel, *i.e.* British and American) is a mechanism that does not depend only on the level of knowledge in terms of linguistic specialization, but also on proper military practice. Our purpose is to find out that most definitions are terminographic, they are specialized definitions, as the theme of our analysis has been the lack of equivalence or, the similarity in terms of relations between terminological corpora. In order to analyze military terminology at a high level of accuracy in the two cultural spaces that used English, we made use of a parallel research: 1) we have analyzed, on the one hand, a corpus of 673 American military terms, with their British equivalent; 2) we have taken into consideration a corpus of 556 British military terms, with their American equivalent.

3. AMERICAN MILITARY TERMINOLOGY

The second part of *British Military Terminology*, entitled “U.S. military terms and

definitions with British equivalent terms” contains a compilation of 673 common American military terms, still in use nowadays – the greatest collection within a terminological specialized corpus – that have an identical equivalent in British English (in military terminology), are fairly accurate equivalents or they don’t have any equivalents at all. From this finding leaves and our analysis that highlights the large class of terms, a first obvious distinction between the three terms. Our analysis starts from this assumption that highlights, within the large class of specialized terms a first clear-cut distinction between the three term categories. Out of the 673 U.S. military terms, 347 (meaning 51.56%!) are identical terms in British military terminology, marked within the collection limits by “Same”. These 347 terms represent, in essence, common English military terminology, representing the basic word stock from the main American military dictionary *The Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, containing amendments brought up until April 15th, 2013, over 2,800 terms (*i.e.* 2,821 words and phrases) useful for common use within the U.S. Department of Defense, being included in JP 1-02 based on a set of criteria derived from linguistic standardization documents such as: Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 5025.12, *Standardization of Military and Associated Terminology*, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 5705.01, *Standardization of Military and Associated Terminology*.

The widening of the meaning of the term *map* used in the military led necessarily to the emergence of other terms, derived by assigning a narrower field, to join the subsequent designation of the reference period, *i.e. combat map*. The result of this type of derivation continues, resulting in narrowing the reference area, led to maintaining, in accordance with the monoconceptual character, of the monoreferential character. Thus, there is a strict hierarchy delimiting conceptual ramifications, *i.e.* the proximate gender of each term, more specialized, customized in relation to the initial proximate

¹ being equally a university teacher specialized in teaching English - specialized terminology, and also military teacher in Romanian Army

term (usually of the word, in lexicographical understanding). We focused on this corpus, inter alia, for a major reason: as long as the terms meaning has a stipulative character, *i.e.* as long as the terminology is required - within the above mentioned monoconceptuality – by the authorized mediators, *Military Intelligence Service / War Department of the department of Defense* has been a reference department, an area authorized in the field of knowledge, not so much in terminology as such, but especially in linguistic pragmatics in relation to this terminological framework.

In a generalized picture of American military terminology, relations are represented as in Figure no.1. It is illustrative in terms of both meaning limitations of a broader terminological corpus, the U.S. military one, which shows a certain stagnation – with no major changes in the last 70 years, between 1943 and 2013 –, and a development trend towards syntagmatic spreading and general openness to general lexis, under the standardization pressure.

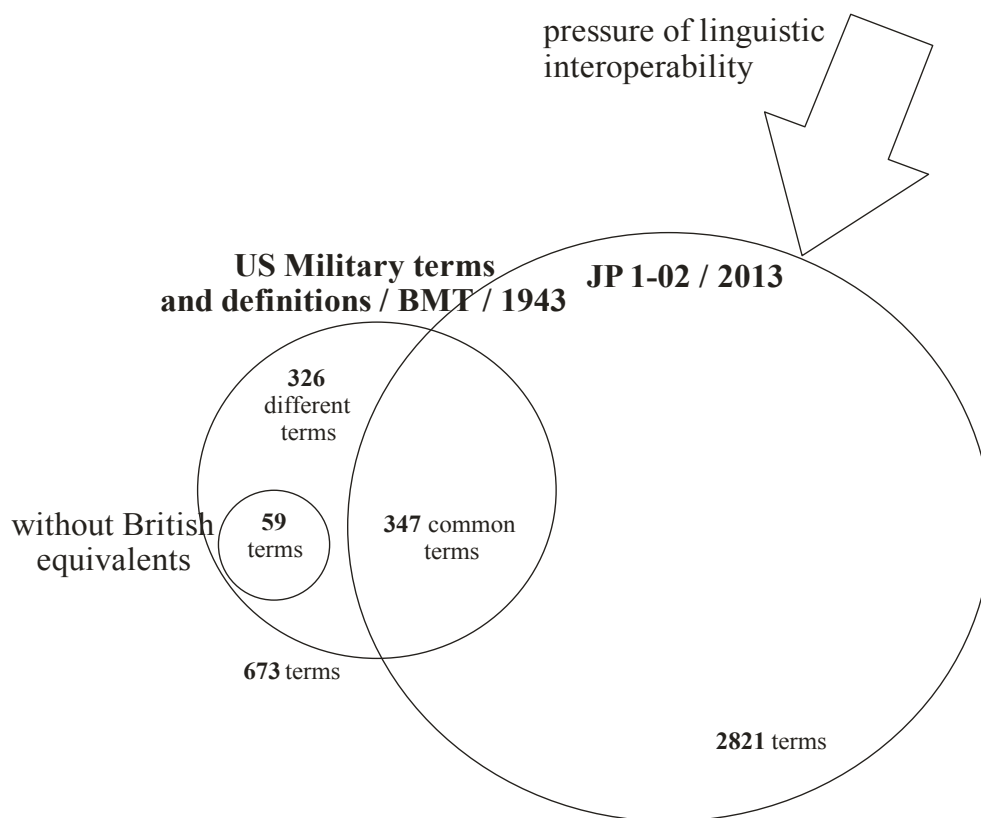


Fig. no.1 The general picture of American military terminology during the last 70 years

The general picture of American military terminology takes the following form: 1) terms identical with those from British military English: 347 (51,56%); 2) terms different from those in British military English: 326 (48,44%), from which 59 (8,77%) with no British equivalent. It should be noted that, from the terms in American English different as compared to the British English ones, with no equivalent in British specialized terminology, only 7 (1.04% of the total,

11.86% of the American terms with no British equivalent): *center, coverage, Echelon, foragers, interdict, photomap, skirmishers* are words, the remaining 52 being expressions. This represents the direct illustration of the fact that the American military terminology derived from the British one and exploited the difference especially in case of derived terms, compounds, expressions and acronyms. In such cases, the lack of equivalency with respect to British terminology may be

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considered to be a temporary deficiency, taking into account the fact that it occurs in relation to the standardization tendency starting with American military terminology, a tendency of terminological equalization.

Concerning the relation between words and phrases present in the list of British American military terms with no equivalent in American/British terminology, things stand as follows: 1) American terms with no equivalent in British military terminology: 11,86%; 2) British terms with no equivalent in American military terminology: 40,00%.

This source corpus is the British one, in which the loan has been made within the American military terminological corpus, many British terms remaining, however, with no American equivalent. In addition, the high percentage of words among British words with no American equivalent – basic linguistic units, functional units of lexicology – represents an extremely important indicator regarding the meaning of loans, in the twentieth century inclusively. On the other hand, the presence of a small number of military American terms with no British equivalent, mostly compound words or other terminological units: phrases, abbreviations, etc. is an indication of further change, of the intervention and transformation of U.S. military corpus in relation to the British one, initial corpus or source.

Furthermore, terms (basic terminological units) of American military terminology are monosemantic units usually expressed through compound words, phrases or acronyms, while British military terms are expressed through words in a rate of 55.46% (percentage not exactly close to the typical American military terminology, 31.06%), but differing substantially in terms of no equivalent terms in American English, where only 40% is encountered as compared to 11.86%. Of these words, 31 are composed, which means that, essentially, the American military terminology contains 26.45% words in the lexicographical meaning of the primary functional unit, the rest being terminological derivations. The American military corpus is the one where the

sintagmatic development tendency is predominant, as seen in previous analyzes. It becomes obvious when specialized terminology usually opens to the general terminology. Therefore, once the simple words have a clear and unequivocal meaning only in communication among the specialist community, the developed terms are meant to include within the defining phrase the specific difference or the direct link with the proximal genre, *i.e.* they tend to make the transfer from specialized to non-specialized speech, as well. From this perspective, the British military terminology does not produce too many terms to enter the common language, while the American military terminology has a closer relation with the general lexis, providing the entrance (in the dictionary) of many expressions, of more terms complex in form and simple in meaning or easily explained in common language. The issue can now be brought into the present moment. If in terms of relations between terminological and lexicology units regarding American and British military terminology things have similar forms:

- percentage of lexicological units of the total number of terminological units regarding British military terminology: 55,46%, from which 17,28% compound words which means basic lexicological units of 38,18%;

- lexicology percentage of the total terminological units regarding American military terminology: 31,06%, from which 4,61% are compound terms, which means basic lexicological units of 26,45%.

In a comparative approach related to the values we are interested in, those about the composition and the sintagmatic openness, we find that within British military corpus the expressions and abbreviations are in percentage of 44.54%, while in the U.S. one the rate is of 68.94%. This is the most eloquent proof of the British and American military corpus derivation (especially since the analysis is based on American terminological units included in the corpus 40 years before the British ones!). In the graphical representation, these issues may take the following form:

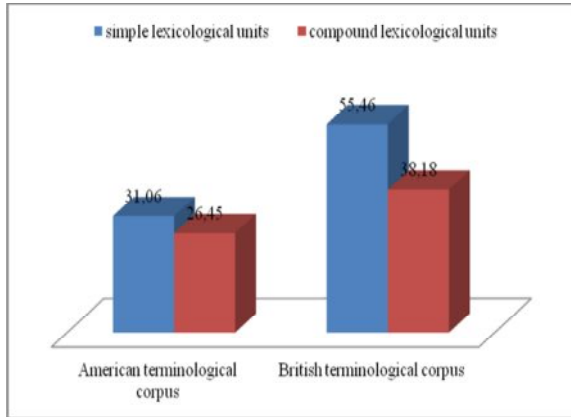


Fig.no.2 The relation between the basic lexicological units percentage present in British and American terminological corpora

The problem can be discussed differently in an analysis of American and British terminology corpora at a distance of 70 years. From this perspective, we can highlight the following distribution: basic lexicological units encountered in *British Military Terminology*: 31,06%; basic lexicological units encountered in *The Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*: 13,19%. Graphically, the distribution can be highlighted as:

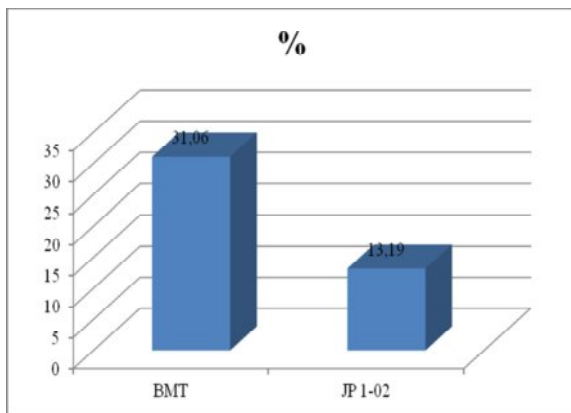


Fig.no.3 The relation between basic lexicological units percentage present within terminological corpora from *British Military Terminology* (1943) and JP 1-02 (2013)

Looking at things in essence, it appears that, over time, the U.S. military terminology removes itself more and more from primary

sources, from lexicological units. Accordingly, the American dictionary of military terms JP 1-02, subject to standardization pressure, can not be taken as a comparison element in terms of the comparative analysis of British and American military terminology. The tendency towards syntagmatic structure and abbreviation can be explained by the need to maintain terms monoconceptual and monoreferential character, within a world that develops in terms of terminology, that leads to increasing needs to derive and replace basic lexicological units with complex terminological units, increasingly complex in form, subsequently abbreviated to achieve the necessary intelligibility and communicability in the military environment.

4. CONCLUSIONS

It is expected that military terminology standardized at NATO level, having the U.S. military terminology as benchmark, to be summarized in a set of phraseological elements which involve the misuse of abbreviations and an increasingly smaller number of basic lexicological units. The comparison between American and British military terminology, especially the diachronic comparison of American terminological corpora seen every 70 years are indicative of the drawing the development directions of this specialized terminological field.

When it comes to American English language one can easily notice that most U.S. military structures have this specific set of behaviours that lead to the use of special expressions and terminological phrases. Based above all on the English language, the daily rhetoric is rich in abbreviations, jargon and slang terms. As these terms evolved, they have taken on a life of their own. In conclusion, as the daily use of English language continues to develop, so will the jargon of the military as it reflects the distinctiveness of their character. The development of English has not led to a language unity throughout all English speaking countries in terms of military terminology. There is still a critical need of standardized military terms as different

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military terms are encountered depending on the country they come from.

However, even if it is more than obvious that British English has been the origin and still is the inspiration and starting point for any American term occurrence, it is a reality that, even at the lowest section or at the platoon level, models will always be employed by NATO forces.

Analyzing the two terminological corpora, that have rather a relative, oriented character, being designed to organize some terminological contents and not to encompass the whole, we have built an overview of American military terminology in the last 70 years – drawing important conclusions regarding the future development of it - and we made a set of comparisons regarding the relation, in parallel, between equivalent terms of the two terminologies, the relation of lexicological and terminological units within them and so on and so forth. This research will continue with another research study of the military corpus in Schur's dictionary (1987/2001) and James' military terms dictionary from 1802. This will complete the image of setting a specific framework of terminological development, based on a specific relationship between lexicological and terminological units that lead to establishing some future trends to be discussed in a future research paper.

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