

## HOMONYMY IN ENGLISH AND BULGARIAN LOGISTICS TERMINOLOGY

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**Abstract:** The paper addresses problems of terminological homonymy in the sphere of a relatively new discipline such as Logistics in both English and Bulgarian language. It points out sources giving rise to homonymy and offers examples to illustrate types of homonyms occurring in logistics texts. Finally, a possible solution is suggested on the differentiation between homonymy and polysemy.

**Key words:** logistics, terminological homonyms, sources, types, teaching implications

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## ОМОНИМИЯТА В ТЕРМИНОЛОГИЯТА ПО ЛОГИСТИКА В АНГЛИЙСКИ И БЪЛГАРСКИ ЕЗИК

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**Резюме:** Докладът разглежда проблеми на терминологична омонимия в сферата на сравнително нова дисциплина, каквато е логистиката в съпоставителен план в английски и български език. Той посочва източници, които водят до омонимия и предлага класификация на видове омоними с примери от текстове в съответната научна сфера. И накрая, предлага се вариант за разграничаване между омонимия и многозначност в терминологията.

**Ключови думи:** логистика, терминологични омоними, източници, видове, приложение в ЧЕО

### INTRODUCTION

While scientists still argue whether there is a new field of knowledge called logistics, it has evolved as a cross-disciplinary science, “stimulated and informed by a wide range of other, older fields of science, ranging from Economics, Mathematics, to the younger fields of Business Administration, the Organization Sciences, and Engineering” [4]. Emerging in mid-twentieth century, logistics has progressed and embraced new concepts and ideas including the modern view of management-oriented, holistic supply chain management.

The logistics terminological system is still in the process of establishment, evolution and modification; nevertheless, it ensures a common language for logistics practitioners. However, it has been subject to very few studies both abroad and in Bulgaria.

The purpose of this paper is to address problems of terminological homonymy in the sphere of this relatively new discipline in both English and Bulgarian language, to point out sources giving rise to homonymy and offer examples to illustrate types of homonyms occurring in logistics texts. Last but not least, it suggests a possible solution on the differentiation between homonymy and polysemy.

### WHAT IS HOMONYMY?

The study of homonymy has often been associated with the study of polysemy and has attracted the interest of a number of linguists. According to ISO 704 homonymy arises when two or

more concepts have identical designations [3]. Yule defines it as a lexical relation where 'one form (written or spoken) has two or more unrelated meanings' [10]. Arnold views it as 'two or more words identical in sound and spelling but different in meaning, distribution and (in many cases) origin' [12]. Both definitions share the difference in meaning but fail to include the (optional) difference in pronunciation and spelling. Therefore a more recent formulation that 'homonyms are words which are identical in sound and spelling, or, at least, in one of these aspects, but different in their meaning' [6] seems to be more comprehensive. Thus homonyms:

- a. belong to the same grammatical category (or not)
- b. coincide in terms of orthography (or not)
- c. may or may not be pronounced in the same way
- d. have different meanings and origins (i.e., they are etymologically and semantically unrelated).

Modern English is exceptionally rich in homonymous words and word forms which Ginzburg et al have explained to be due to the monosyllabic structure of the commonly used English words [2]. Like polysemy, homonymy is not uncommon for terminology.

Just as polysemy as a phenomenon shatters the idealized view of terminology where a designation corresponds to a concept, homonymy has to account for different meanings of the same term as they occur in texts. Sager highlights the fact that if a term form could belong to more than one subject field, then it would be differently defined [8], thus pointing out that a possible reason for it is transdisciplinary interaction as well as the necessity to identify the context in which each of the forms functions.

The problems associated with polysemy and homonymy have been discussed by Apresjan who discriminates between metonymically and metaphorically motivated polysemy; and depending on the relations in-between the word senses - regular (or systematic) and irregular (or non-systematic) polysemy [11]. The general assumption of two main types of polysemy has been held for long in literature, however, there are divisions in their interpretation sometimes considering non-systematic polysemy homonymy. He goes on to say: "Polysemy and homonymy are relative concepts [...] On the other hand, we can speak of different types of polysemy from the point of view of their relative remoteness from homonymy." [1] Therefore, he considers homonymy a case where the senses are in general less related to each other, because they are arbitrarily grouped under the same surface form - i.e. the same word. Irregular polysemy, which is often based on metaphor, relates senses in a more coherent manner than homonymy.

### SOURCES OF HOMONYMY

Sources of homonymy may be found in borderline cases of irregular polysemy (referring to Apresjan) or **split polysemy** (according to other authors), e.g. *bight* – 1.a. *A loop in a rope*; b. *The middle or slack part of an extended rope*. 2. a. *A bend or curve, especially in a shoreline*; b. *A wide bay formed by such a bend or curve*;

1. *бухта* (залив във формата на полумесец); 2. *извивка на река, бряг*; 3. *въжсена бухта*; 4. *примка на въже* [21].

Dictionaries differ in categorizing these four meanings by either giving them a stand-alone status or grouping them in pairs. However, it is obvious that only special subject knowledge will find a correspondence among them.

**Translingual borrowing** may also give rise to homonymy, e.g. *sound* as a noun may be related to 1. *anything that can be heard, a note, a tone* – *звук* in subject fields like physics, acoustics, echolocation, phonology, music, etc. or 2. *a narrow channel of the sea joining two larger bodies of water* as in the Sound - a strait between SW Sweden and Denmark, linking the Kattegat with the Baltic and 3. *a large and deep bay* as in Long Island Sound situated off the East Coast of the USA. The first sense is derived from the Latin *sonus* while the other two come from Old English *sund* meaning sea.

**Word-building** is very productive in a number of patterns but with terms it is most often associated with abbreviation or clipping. A good example is *CEU* = *Car Equivalent Unit* -

*еквивалентна единица при превоз на автомобили* formed on the analogy of *TEU* and *FEU* – terms used in shipping containers. It becomes ambiguous in proximity with electronic terms – *Control Electronic Unit*, or EU legislation - *Commission of the European Union*, etc.

Overall, depending on the source homonymy in terminology occurs 1. between a term and a commonly used word which may be due to terminologization or determinologization and 2. between terms belonging to different subject fields – the so-called intersystem homonymy ([16] as cited by [14]). Typical of the latter type is that the terms have different definitions and operate in different terminologies.

The fact has been recorded by Manolova who states that reterminologization results in intersystem homonymy whereby two separate lexemes – the source term and the derived one – interact [13]. The process of terminologization is easily illustrated by *кnee - коляно* which is used in everyday speech but has found way in construction, botanical as well as nautical texts meaning *въгълник, кница*. The latter or reverse process can be exemplified with *apex* – 1. *The point on the celestial sphere toward which the sun appears to move relative to nearby stars*; 2. *The topmost vertex of a cone or pyramid*; 3. *A narrowed or pointed end of an anatomical structure* [20], etc. which has been transferred in everyday use as the highest or pointed end of something – *върх, апекс* as in the *apex* of the curve - *апекса* на завоя.

An interesting example to discuss is *float* which illustrates both inter- and intrasystem homonymy. As a term it belongs to a number of domains – physics, banking, engineering, etc. According to the APICS Dictionary the term appears in three spheres related to logistics: *float* – 1. *The amount of work-in-process inventory between two manufacturing operations, especially in repetitive manufacturing* - *запаси незавършена продукция между две производствени операции*; 2) *In supply chains, the time necessary for items such as documents and checks to go from one supply chain partner to another* - *времето необходимо документи и др. да преминат от един партньор до друг*; 3) *In project management, the amount of time that an activity's early start or early finish time can be delayed without delaying the completion time of the entire project* - *резерв от време* [18].

Analysing English railway terms homonymy Chernishova establishes a type of national-cognitive homonymy based on differences in British and American terminology and attributes it to regional specifics and practices. This is best illustrated with the term *car* which means *an automobile or a vehicle with four wheels and an engine that is used for carrying passengers on roads* on both sides of the pond. Semantic differences arise with its meaning related to a part of a train. In American English it is ‘*any passenger or freight rail vehicle*’ while in British use it is somewhat narrowed – typically ‘*a carriage in an electric passenger train*’ [17].

This type of homonymy can also be illustrated by *intermodal transportation*. It is defined in British sources as *the movements of passengers or freight from one mode of transport to another (i.e. road, rail, sea, air)*. In North America, the term *intermodal* is also used to refer to *containerized rail transportation*. A *depot* in British English denotes *склад; хранилище; хамбар* but in American English it is generally employed in the sense ‘*bus station, train station*’ (*автогара, ж.п. станция*).

## CLASSIFICATION OF SYNONYMS

Depending on whether they have the same spelling and pronunciation or not, homonyms may be categorized into:

a. **homonyms proper (true)** - identical in sound form and spelling – e.g. *interline* – 1. *relating to, involving companies, especially airlines, by which passengers, baggage, and freight are transferred from one carrier to another using only one ticket or one check-in procedure*; 2. *writing or inserting (words, phrases, etc.) between the lines of writing or print* - 1. *обща авиолиния*; 2. *разредка* [19]. Other examples are *lean* (*икономичен*) and *lean* (*облягам се*), *train* (*влак*) and *train* (*обучавам*), etc.

b. **homophones** – if they differ in spelling but sound the same – e.g. *site* (*местоположение*)/*sight* (*гледка*); *key* (*ключ*)/*quay* (*кей*); *boy* (*момче*)/*buoy* (*буй*), etc.

c. **homographs** – if they spell the same but are pronounced differently – e.g. *lead* [led] as in lead ingot or sounding lead - 1. *олово*; 2. *лот* but *lead* [li:d] as in panama lead or foul lead – 1. *вързален ключ*; 2. *тесен канал*.

Some scholars add **heteronyms** as a subclass of homographs to indicate ‘words having the same spelling, but a different sound and meaning’ which should lead to a slight modification in the definition of homographs to include ‘not necessarily sound the same’. They usually present homonyms as different parts of speech, e.g. *permit* as a verb - *разрешавам* and as a noun - *разрешително, пасо* or *produce* as a verb – *произвеждам* and as a noun – (*селско-стопанска*) *продукция*.

Based on their grammatical meaning homonyms are divided into **complete (full)** and **partial homonyms** [15]. If their paradigms coincide completely, such as *seal* (n) – *a sea animal* and *seal* (n) – *a design printed on paper by means of a stamp* – *тюлен; печат, пломба*, then they are full homonyms. In Bulgarian this can be exemplified with *кран* (*за чешма* – хол. ) и *кран* (*за повдигане* – нем.).

With **partial homonyms** the paradigms coincide only partially differing either grammatically or lexically or both. So the following types may be distinguished:

a. **simple lexico-grammatical** - which belong to the same part of speech but their paradigms have only one identical form, e.g. *bound* (v): *to border* *гранича* and *bound* (past part. of to bind) - *насочен, на път за*.

b. **complex lexico-grammatical** - which belong to different parts of speech and have one identical form in their paradigms, e.g. *green* (adj) - *зелен* or *екологосъобразен* and *green* (v) – *позеленявам, внедрявам „зелени“ практики* which is typical of conversion.

c. **lexical homonyms** – which belong to the same part of speech but are identical only in corresponding forms of their paradigms, e.g. the plural of *custom* (n) – *customs* - *обичаи* and *customs* (n) – *митница*. Or *spring* (n) – 1. *сизигия, сизигиен прилив*; 2. *шпринг*; 3. (техн.) *пружина*; 4. *извор*; 5. *пролет* [21]. Historically, all the senses of the word are related to its core meaning - *to rise, leap, move suddenly*, therefore we can conclude that their meanings were a result of metaphor. At the head of a stream the water sometimes leaps, so does a spring tide when the forces of the sun and moon cause the greatest tide in height and force to take place. When a boat or a ship ‘springs’ or ‘works’ against the lines, these are her ‘spring lines’. In its technical use a spring is an elastic coil that returns to its shape. Last but not least, plants spring up in the season following winter. Of all the meanings analysed, only the fifth one is a lexical homonym as it is usually used in singular and as a modifier.

In Bulgarian terminological homonymy is not frequent [14] and may be relevant to the extent that it may cause ambiguity. It is more common in general vocabulary frequently used in special subject-fields which may still hinder complete understanding of a text. It is manifested both as full and partial, e.g. *брак* – ‘*свързване на мъж и жена за съвместен семеен живот*’ и ‘*негодна стока*’ and *мед-медът* (as a *fluid made by bees*); *мед-медта* (as a *metal*). The distinction between lexical and grammatical homonyms is more pertinent to the Bulgarian nouns and verbs as their word forms tend to yield to homonymy more. Probably this is why a type of grammatical homonymy called homoforms has been introduced by Bulgarian lexicologists.

#### PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH POLYSEMY AND HOMONYMY

Without a doubt, polysemy and homonymy must be clearly differentiated to achieve conceptual clarity and to ensure practical applications. A possible solution from a semantic point of view is to seek a core meaning, and the homonymous items sharing the same core meaning should be undoubtedly marked as polysemous [9].

Another option is looking for synonyms. A word that is polysemic will have a variety of synonyms each corresponding to one of its meanings as well as a set of antonyms. It is tempting to say that where the antonym is the same, there is polysemy, and the differences of antonyms will refer to homonymy [7]. Grammar and word-formation may also offer a key to discriminating between the two.

Last but not least, context plays a vital role with polysemic words while with homonyms it does not so much. It would be fair to say that with polysemic words sense variation is achieved through context whereas with homonyms this may be accounted for with etymology. Therefore, the final decision is to be taken on a synchronic level [5].

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper was to raise awareness to the problems homonymy can give rise to. As a sense relation it is inevitably interrelated with other such relations – polysemy, synonymy, antonymy and should be analyzed within these relations.

Homonymy requires a special treatment because of the ambiguities it can cause even in specialized communication. Therefore, if it cannot be avoided, it should be used in sufficient and appropriate context in order to provide disambiguation. Possible teaching techniques may involve giving clear definitions, systematizing terms, categorizing them depending on the part of speech they belong to, etc. Making collocations and explaining etymology may also be pertinent.

Whether the issues discussed here apply to logistics terminology or not, they should be given due note especially when they stem from transdisciplinary (or intersystem) and translanguagual borrowing. In such cases the meanings should be deciphered clearly and their contextual occurrence examined carefully. If addressed properly, any of the methods pointed out above can help learners to assign the appropriate sense to a homonym in a given context with high accuracy. Which is what teachers are aiming at...

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## DICTIONARIES AND GLOSSARIES

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