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## **Maritime figurative and literal multiword terms in the ESP classroom: A blueprint**

**Silvia Molina-Plaza**<sup>a\*</sup>, Technical University of Madrid, ETSI Navales, Madrid 28040, Spain

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is two-fold: a) look into the socio-cultural background of the most common twenty five sub-technical multiword naval units in a pilot corpus of 250,000 words, some of them metaphorical & metonymic expressions (Kovecses, 2002; Wray 2002); b) study ten of these metaphorical units in their contexts of production (EU maritime discourse, textbooks and <http://www.sailingscuttlebutt.com/news/04/ras/>). Multiword units have been chosen with WORDSMITH TOOLS, regarding frequency of use a key factor. The conclusions point out that these multiword units are highly productive in oral and written maritime discourse and worthy of investigation. They reveal that both denotative (in terminological collocations) and evaluative meanings may be embedded in lexical-semantic structures. The lexicographical description of these collocations in learner's dictionaries available in Maritime English ends with the recognition that development of collocations seems necessary if we are to witness some further progress for ESL learners in productive mode.

Keywords: Multiword Units (MWUs, maritime language, sub-technical terms; metaphor and metonymy; teaching ESP terms

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\* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Silvia Molina-Plaza**, Technical University of Madrid, ETSI Navales, Madrid 28040, Spain.  
E-mail address: [silvia.molina@upm.es](mailto:silvia.molina@upm.es) / Tel.: +34 913367200

## 1. Introduction

Naval terminology allows professionals to streamline their communication by conveying meanings as succinctly as possible using the right terminology which reflects different subjects (oceanography, fishing, strategy, history, naval customs, etc.). Attention has been paid to the teaching of individual words (e.g. abaft, abeam, aboard, etc.) in ESP literature but students also need to know multiword units (MWUs) related to their discipline to speak and write fluently. It is my contention that there are different strategies to teach these MWUs and single terms, namely, the following: a) using definition+graphs; b) explaining their socio-cultural background and c) exploring metaphorical and metonymic terms. This study will focus mainly on the two latter categories. One example of traditional teaching of MWUs is provided below in example 1 with its translation equivalent into Spanish:

- **coastal upwelling**> Coastal upwelling is the best known type of upwelling, and the most closely related to human activities as it supports some of the most productive fisheries in the world. Wind-driven currents are diverted to the right of the winds in the Northern Hemisphere and to the left in the Southern Hemisphere due to the Coriolis Effect (*afloramiento costero*).

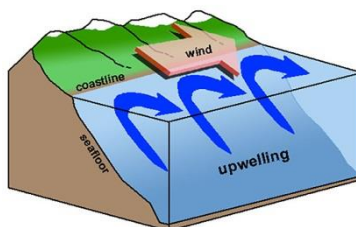


Figure 1. Coastal upwelling

Specifically, the aim of this paper is two-fold: a) look into the socio-cultural background of the most common multiword naval units and a few single terms in a pilot corpus of 250,000 words, some of them metaphorical & metonymic expressions (Kovecses, 2002; Wray 2002); b) study ten of these metaphorical units in their contexts of production (EU maritime discourse, textbooks and <http://www.sailingscuttlebutt.com/news/04/ras/>). Multiword units have been chosen with WORDSMITH TOOLS, regarding frequency of use a key factor. Examples of the metaphorical & metonymic phrasemes are sea change, at the helm, in the same boat, even keel.

## 2. Socio-cultural background of MWUs

Some studies highlight the importance of teaching the socio-cultural background for learning vocabulary and MWUs effectively (Gross, 1990; Pawley, 2001; Skandera 2007). This assertion proves quite true when looking at fishing terminology from a contrastive perspective (English-Spanish) in table 1. English MWUs are fairly easy to understand even for the non-expert user, whereas Spanish terms require specialized knowledge. Interestingly, English MWUS are translated by just one word into Spanish, although it is not always the case:

**Table 1. English Fishing MWUs and their Spanish counterparts.**

ENGLISH	SPANISH
snare/fish trap	<i>garlito</i>
catch in a net	<i>redar</i>
spawning season	<i>desove</i>

History is another relevant source for teaching maritime MWUs. Examples 2 to 4 below prove the relevance of including brief historical explanations for the understanding of these terms. The translations into Spanish are provided for ease of reference. Table 2 shows the historical influence of English nautical terms in Spanish naval terminology for designing parts of the ship:

**(2) Coxswain (*timonel*)**

A coxswain or cockswain was at first the swain (boy servant) in charge of the small cock or cockboat that was kept aboard for the ship's captain and which was used to row him to and from the ship. The term has been in use in England dating back to at least 1463. With the passing of time the coxswain became the helmsman of any boat, regardless of size.

**(3) Fathom (*braza*)**

Although a fathom is now a nautical unit of length equal to six feet, it was once defined by an act of Parliament as "the length of a man's arms around the object of his affections." The word derives from the OE Faethm, which means "embracing arms".

**(4) Fouled anchor (*ancla rodeada por cadenas o cuerdas*).**

The fouled (rope- or chain-entwined) anchor is a symbol at least 500 years old that has its origins in the British traditions adopted by the naval service.

The anchor (both with and without the entwined rope) is a traditional heraldic device used in ancient British coats of arms.

**Table 2. Influence of English nautical terms in Spanish naval terms**

ENGLISH	SPANISH
bonnet	<i>boneta</i>
trinket	<i>trinquete</i>
thole pin	<i>tolete</i>
scuttle	<i>escotilla</i>
ratline	<i>relinga</i>

It is also relevant to pay attention to sub-technical MWUs in Maritime contexts. They refer to terms which are neither highly technical to the Maritime field nor clearly everyday words. These MWUs may be classified in various types (from *a* to *e*):

a) MWUs which *express* notions general to specialized areas, e.g. *fatigue failure*. This collocation is used when a metal subjected to a repetitive or fluctuating stress will fail at a stress much lower than that required to cause fracture on a single application of load. These fatigue failures also happen in Aeronautical, Automotive engineering.

Examples of where fatigue may occur in a marine diesel engine are: crankshafts, valve springs, turbocharger blades, piston crowns, bottom end bolts, piston skirts at the gudgeoned pin boss and tie bolts.

b) Terms which have a specialized meaning in Maritime engineering, e.g. *hull slamming* and also a different meaning in general language. *Hull slamming* or *slamming* is the violent impact between sea waves and a portion of a craft's hull, resulting in large plating loads due to the large relative velocity. This can occur subsequent to a forward foil broach, as in example 5 below:

(5) Stephen Priestley, Researcher, Canadian American Strategic Review Construction methods have a minimal effect on the handling of vessels of this size. In heavy seas, MCDVs are prone to hull slamming – generating impact forces that can damage hull plating. The **hull-slamming** is, to some degree, inevitable with a short, beamy hull.

“Slamming” in general language refers to the illegal practice of switching a consumer's traditional wire line telephone company for local, local toll, or long distance service without permission.

c) MWUs with a metaphorical or metonymic origin. Metaphors and metonymies are used in engineering contexts (Roldan & Molina 2013, Cuadrado et al 2015). They can be image metaphors — metaphors that link one concrete object to another—promoting visualization in the reader (example 6 below describing a *mushroom anchor*, a type of anchor with a heavy inverted mushroom shaped head.) or conceptual metaphors, in which one conceptual domain is understood in terms of another:

(6) For more than 150 years a well seated **mushroom anchor** has been the standard permanent mooring in the harbors of New England and Long Island Sound.

d) MWUs which are not used in general language but which have different meanings in several specialized areas, e.g. *Jacob's ladder*. It's a nautical term which describes a portable ladder of ropes or chains supporting wooden or metal rungs or steps. See example 7 translated into Spanish as *escala de gato*:

(7) On the day of the at-sea event, Rodney M. Davis launched its rigid-hull inflatable boat (RHIB) to transport the Indonesians back and forth between the ships. (...) "It takes major coordination between us and the Indonesians to conduct this evolution," noted Long, as he waited near the top of the **Jacob's ladder** for more Indonesian teams to arrive.

However, this polysemous MWU should not be confused with a collocation from the Electronics genre, which requires a totally different translation into Spanish: *arco eléctrico producido por un dispositivo formado por dos conductores rectos en forma de'* (example 8):

(8) **What is a Jacob's ladder** you ask?(...). It's the funny looking device in the background that has a small electrical arc rising between two steel rods over and over again giving off an eerie electrostatic sound, creating a pretty neat visual effect.

e) Items which are commonly viewed as general language vocabulary (idioms with figurative meaning) but which have a restricted meaning in the Maritime context. Examples (9 to 18) are organized by alphabetical order and their explanation mainly comes from the website phrases.org.uk:

(9) **All at sea**. This is an extension of the nautical phrase 'at sea'. It dates from the days of sail when accurate navigational aids weren't available. Any ship that was out of sight of land was in an uncertain position and in danger of becoming lost.' At sea' has been in use since the 18th century, as here, in Sir William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the laws of England*, 1768:"If a court of equity were still **at sea**, and floated upon the occasional opinion which the judge who happened to preside might entertain of conscience in every particular case". In general English nowadays, it means in a state of confusion and disorder.

(10) **Brass monkey**. It is often stated that the phrase originated from the use of a brass tray, called a "monkey", to hold cannonballs on warships in the 16th to 18th centuries. Supposedly, in very cold

temperatures the "monkey" would contract, causing the balls to fall off. However, this interpretation is considered by many experts as an urban legend.

"Monkey" has other numerous nautical meanings, such as a small coastal trading vessel; a small wooden cask in which grog was carried after issue from a grog-tub to the seamen's messes in the Royal Navy; a type of marine steam reciprocating engine where two engines were used together in tandem on the same propeller shaft; and a sailor whose job involved climbing and moving swiftly (usage dating to 1858). In general English, the MWU *Brass monkeys* means now "very cold weather".

(11) **The Bull Ensign** is the senior junior officer of the rank of Ensign (O-1) in a ship's compliment. A Bull Ensign will often be recognized by his uniform's oversized gold ensign collar device engraved with the word "Bull." The origin of the term *Bull Ensign* is uncertain, though the combination of the words "bull" and "ensign" likely occurred in the mid-20th century.

The first published use of the word "ensign" indicating the lowest rank of commissioned naval officer dates to 1708 when it was used in the London Gazette. The US Navy adopted the rank in 1862 as a replacement for the rank of passed midshipman (a Naval Academy graduate). In general English, *bull* is slang for a Royal Navy ship and an English person (1835); a railway locomotive (1859); a police officer/prison guard/detective (1893); something large and powerful (1889); and a logging foreman or boss (1942).

(12) **A Wide berth** is most commonly found in the phrases 'keep a wide berth of', 'give a wide berth to' etc. It was originally a nautical term. We now think of a ship's berth as the place where the ship is moored. Before that though it meant 'a place where there is sea room to moor a ship'. When sailors were warned to keep a wide bearing off something, they were being told to make sure to maintain enough sea room from it.

It dates back to the Seventeenth century. An early use comes from Captain John Smith in *Accidental Young Seamen*, 1626: "Watch bee vigilant to keepe your berth to windward. "In general current English this MWU means 'A goodly distance'.

(13) **Battening down the hatches**. 'Hatch' is one of those words with dozens of meanings in a technical dictionary. In this case, we are looking at the 'opening in the deck of a ship' meaning. Ships' hatches, more formally called hatchways, were necessary on sailing ships and were normally either open or covered with a wooden grating to allow for ventilation of the lower decks. When there was bad weather, the hatches were sheltered with tarpaulin and the covering was edged with wooden strips, called battens, to prevent it from blowing off.

An Example of this MWU is found in Admiral W H Smyth's 1867 encyclopaedia *The Sailor's Word Book*. Smyth, he uses a variation, 'battening of the hatches' but it is clearly the same expression:

"**Battens of the hatches**: Long narrow laths serving by the help of nailing to confine the edges of the tarpaulins, and keep them close down to the sides of the hatchways in bad weather." Nowadays it means 'to prepare for trouble'.

(14) **Cut and run**. It has been suggested that it has a nautical derivation and that it refers to ships making a hasty departure by the cutting of the anchor rope and running before the wind. The earliest known citation of 'cut and run' is the 1704 Boston News Letter: "Cap. Vaughn rode by said Ship, but **cut & run**."

The 'cutting rope' derivation was certainly accepted later in that century by David Steel, the author of the 1794 tome *The Elements and Practice of Rigging and Seamanship*:

"**To Cut and run**, to cut the cable and make sail instantly, without waiting to weigh anchor." In general current English it means now 'to run away'.

(15) **Edge forward/toward**. The phrase 'edging forward' describes this inch-by-inch progress. It was first used in the Seventeenth century, typically in nautical contexts and referring to slow advance by

means of repeated small tacking movements, as here in Captain John Smith's *The generall historie of Virginia, New-England and the Summer Isles* 1624: "After many tempests and foule weather, about the foureteenth of March we were in thirteene degrees and an halfe of Northerly latitude, where we descried a ship at hull; it being but a faire gale of wind, we **edged towards** her to see what she was". It now means in current English 'to join a conversation in which another is speaking continually and leaving little opportunity for others'. This practice of 'edging' was used with reference to the spoken word by David Abercromby, in *Art of Converse*, 1683: "Without giving them so much time as **to edge in a word**".

(16) **On your beam ends**. The beams here refer to the horizontal transverse timbers of ships. This nautical phrase came about with the allusion to the danger of imminent capsizing if the beam ends were touching the water. This dates back to the Eighteenth century and is cited in a 1773 issue of *The Gentleman's Magazine*: "The gust laid her **upon her beam-ends**."

The current meaning 'Hard up; in a bad situation' came soon afterwards, in Captain Marryat's *The King's Own*, 1830: "Our first-lieutenant was **on his beam-ends**, with the rheumatiz."

(17) **Slush Fund**. 'Slush', or 'slosh', which is the fat or grease obtained from meat boiled on board ship. Slush was considered a perk for ships' crew and they sold the fat that they gathered from cooking meat whenever they reached port. This practice became known as a 'slush fund' as in *Evils & Abuses in Naval & Merchant Service*, 1839: "The sailors in the navy are allowed salt beef. From this provision, when cooked nearly all the fat boils off; this is carefully skimmed and put into empty beef or pork barrels, and sold, and the money so received is called the **slush fund**".

Nowadays, it is money put aside to make use of when required. The use of such savings for improper uses like bribes or the purchase of influence began in the USA not long afterwards. The Congressional Record for January 1894 printed this: "[Cleveland] was not elected in 1888 because of pious John Wanamaker and his \$400,000 of campaign **slush funds**".

(18) **Tide over**. The original 'tiding over' was a seafaring term and derives ultimately from 'tide', synonymous with 'time'. The literal meaning was 'in the absence of wind to fill the sails, float with the tide'. This usage was recorded by the English seaman Captain John Smith. His influential sailor's manual *A Sea Grammar*, 1627 includes this earliest known citation of this MWU: "To **Tide ouer** to a place, is to goe ouer with the Tide of ebbe or flood, and stop the contrary by anchoring till the next Tide."

That sense of tiding over, in which ships would tide over here and tide over there, was outdated by a 'coping with a short-term problem' meaning. This meaning drew on the imagery of ships floating over obstacles on a swelling tide. This general usage of that image was established by the early 19th century, as in the Earl of Dudley's Letters to the Bishop of Llandaff, 1821: "I wish we may be able to **tide over** this difficulty."

The former MWUs examples were taught to students of *English for Professional and Academic Communication* studying two different degrees at the Naval Engineering School of Madrid: Naval Architecture and Maritime Engineering. Students have a B2 level and were interested to find out the particulars of these MWUs. They said that getting to know the socio-cultural background and figurative meaning of some MWUs helped their Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition. They also realized that idiomatic MWUs cannot be always translated word by word, as they also have figurative meaning on certain occasions. Generally speaking, the learner's assumption was that the meaning of the whole was the sum of the meaning of its parts. They were also surprised to meet that naval language was so rich in the use of metaphors. The first activity related to the learning of these metaphorical chunks was to ask students to brainstorm the words in a ship. They came up with words such as *hatch, hull, tide*. Once I checked that students have understood the literal meaning of all the words involved, I ask them to guess what the metaphorical meaning of these words or MWUS might be.



### 3. Metaphorical Expressions used in EU Discourse

An extra activity for learning current maritime MWUs used in institutional discourse was carried out. I explained my students that figurative MWUs from the maritime register are used to manifest expert writer’s stance not only in European Union Fisheries and Maritime Affairs (EUFMA) but also in other types of EU Institutional Discourse. Hyland (2005, 2009) explains that stance involves positioning, or adopting a point of view (in this case about fishing, maritime affairs, agriculture and rural development issues) in relation to both the issues discussed in the text and to others who hold similar or different points of view. EU writers express their “judgments, feelings or viewpoint about something” (Hyland, 2005:174) and relate to the EU common value system and they are influenced by different epistemological assumptions and permissible criteria of justification common to the EU institutional contexts. Stance allows report writers to present themselves as fully committed in their arguments.

Electronic searches in the EU website rendered the following results shown in graph 489 maritime metaphorical MWUs were found. (Examples 19 to 26) explore the uses of these MWUs in their contexts of production.

**Table 3. Most frequent MWUs used in EU Discourse**

MWU (Multiword unit)	Number of raw tokens
<i>Sea change/sea of change</i>	150
<i>At the helm</i>	174
<i>In the same boat</i>	76
<i>Turn the tide</i>	75

**(19) Sea change/ Sea of change:** "a change wrought by the sea". (OED)

This MWU is often used metaphorically to mean a metamorphosis or alteration. It mainly appears in Functioning of the EU texts (46 raw tokens), followed by Infrastructure, research and innovation (38 raw tokens) and Business and Industry (20 raw tokens) as in the example below:

“The current economic buzzword is 'generative' - the economy is undergoing a **sea-change** transformation as more and more corporations climb on the lifeboat that has rescued so many already from the nastiness of cut-throat competition without ethics for the sake of a dwindling number of faceless but vastly rich shareholders.(Digital Agenda for Europe, Futurium, 2013)”

This maritime metaphor referring to changes in economy is further elaborated by lifeboat (underlined in the example). This MWU is mainly used as a noun phrase to assess changes and actions in EU Discourse.

**(20) At the helm.** It is used in the figurative sense “to be in the position of control of something.” It transfers the idea of steering a ship to directing other enterprises, as in the following example, the title of a Fisheries report whose aim is to set guidelines for fishing families living in Norway: “**At the Helm.** Organising Daily Life and Occupational Participation in Fishing Families). NFFR-report II, Tromsø, Norway: Norwegian College of Fisheries Science” ([http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/documentation/studies/role\\_of\\_women/annex4\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/documentation/studies/role_of_women/annex4_en.pdf)).

**(21) In the same boat,** whose meaning is “in the same predicament or trouble”.

This expression refers to the dangers shared by passengers in a small boat at sea. This MWU has been found in Janez Potočnik’s speech, Commissioner for Environment, when referring to the deterioration of marine ecosystems: “To me, **'being in the same boat'** forces us to take a more

responsible attitude. And I believe we are doing just that. But we need to work harder and build on the momentum provided by the current economic situation and the growing awareness of the deterioration of marine ecosystems. Our new approach to maritime policy must emphasize sustainability” ([http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release SPEECH-10-263\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-10-263_en.htm)).

(22)**Even keel**. Its literal meaning is “floating level, without inclination”. It means now “to keep the stability of something” figuratively, as in the following example where the maritime MWU is applied in a finance context: “In general, thus, immigration policies should aim to keep the development of foreign workers **on an even keel** in the medium term and to avoid harmful stop-and-go policies” ([http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/publications/publication644\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/publication644_en.pdf)).

(23)**Take/ try a different tack**. It means to use a different method for dealing with a difficult situation, especially in the way you communicate with other people. It is used in a report about sustainable tourism in Europe:

A SWOT analysis can determine whether a different focus is needed, e.g. going for a bigger area because the attractions are too limited or targeting more of the different market segments. This simply means going back to the situation analysis and **trying a different tack**. (<http://ec.europa.eu/DocsRoom/documents/1740/attachments/1/translations/en/renditions/pdf>)

(24) **Ocean of opportunity**. It alludes to “plenty of opportunities”. It is a creative metaphor, an original comparison between two unlike things that calls attention to itself. It is used by the Commissioner, Borg, to refer to the new opportunities offered to stakeholders by Integrated Policy Making: “**Ocean of opportunity**. In October 2007, after a year-long public consultation, the European Commission published a Communication describing its vision for an Integrated Maritime Policy for the EU, together with a detailed action plan setting out an ambitious work programme for the years ahead.” ([http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/documentation/publications/pcp2008\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/documentation/publications/pcp2008_en.pdf))

(25) **Turn the tide**. It literally means “at high or low water”. It now also means “change of opinion” outside maritime contexts as in this sentence from a press release during the World Water Week “and the private sector to join us and help us **turn the tide** and do all we can to preserve our precious water supplies before it's too late ([http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release MEMO-12-627\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-12-627_en.htm))

(26) **Row in the same direction**. Rowing in the same direction was essential for good sailing in the old days. Today it means “to work as a team in order to obtain results” Durao Barroso uses it frequently in his speeches, as shown in examples (26). Interestingly, the MWU coexists with another MWU from maritime language (“in the same boat” underlined in example 26) to add greater emphasis, that is, to persuade EU citizens of the need to collaborate together in times of economic hardship:

“Secondly, the “everyman for himself” principle is not acceptable. We are all in the same boat. Let’s make sure we **are rowing in the same direction**. What Europe needs most today is unity. This is exactly the “European spirit” I would like to instil in the current circumstances. Thank you”. ([europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-09-97\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-09-97_en.htm))

A salient rhetorical feature of these metaphorical MWUs is that they create an authoritative, direct, assured tone for EU Institutional Discourse. Finally, it is interesting to note that there are several instances of syntactic variation in the metaphors. They frequently refer to hardship caused by economic crisis when used with negative axiology.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

As we have seen, many MWUs in English form part of the repertoire of ESP and are worthy of teaching. Several maritime idioms have undergone a process of metaphorization. There is a co-existence of literal and metaphorical uses as shown in the examples above. A teacher can develop



students' awareness of maritime metaphors by encouraging students to 'collect' metaphors - by noting them down when they encounter them on the Internet, in journals, etc. These metaphors can then be explained and discussed in the classroom (Cameron and Low, 1999).

Finally, we have also seen that maritime idioms are used in EU Discourse apart from Fisheries to express certain ideas and policies for users of different types of text: legislative summaries, Commissioner's speeches, etc. They tend to co-occur in oral texts for adding greater emphasis and communicative impact. These MWUs are not easily found in maritime glossaries for Spanish ESP learners. Fortunately, the internet is an exceptionally rich source of collocational information. Clearly enough, an L2-L1 MWUs list becomes a necessity from B2 level onwards.

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