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A STUDY OF NAUTICAL TERMS AND THEIR USE IN EVERYDAY LANGUAGE

103698 – Treball de Fi de Grau

Grau en Traducció i Interpretació

Curs acadèmic 2014-2015

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10 de juny de 2015

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DETAILS OF THE STUDY

Title: A Study of Nautical Terms and Their Use in Everyday Language

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Studies: Grau en Traducció i Interpretació

Academic year: 2014-2015

Abstract

This study analysed fifteen expressions of nautical origin, proved their current usage in written English and explained some possible processes that lead to their validity in everyday language. This was accomplished through linguistic analyses of the idioms and of examples in use, and through linguistic theory. The study consists of four sections which, in order of appearance, are a historical contextualisation, a study of the origin and the meaning of fifteen nautical expressions, an analysis of the terminology through real examples in everyday language, and a linguistic explanation of the processes of change in language. These analyses and explanations revealed that some terms of eighteenth-century nautical jargon are still in use in everyday written English, that some of these expressions are used in a wider range of registers than dictionaries state, and that one of the possible explanations for the language spread is 'lexical diffusion'. This study also points to the possibility that some of the expressions under study might fall into disuse and suggested further research on the nautical influence in everyday spoken English.

Keywords: jargon, nautical, eighteenth century, expression, idiom, everyday language, evolution, lexical diffusion

Resumen

En este estudio se analizan quince expresiones de origen náutico, se demuestra su uso actual en inglés escrito y se explican posibles procesos que han podido llevar a la vigencia de estas en el lenguaje cotidiano. El proceso se llevó a cabo mediante análisis lingüísticos de los modismos y de ejemplos en uso y mediante teoría lingüística. El estudio consta de cuatro apartados que, por orden de aparición, son una contextualización histórica, un estudio del origen y el significado de quince expresiones náuticas, un análisis de la terminología a través de ejemplos reales en el lenguaje cotidiano y una explicación lingüística de los procesos de cambio en la lengua. Estos análisis y explicaciones revelaron que algunos términos de la jerga náutica del siglo XVIII siguen vigentes en inglés cotidiano escrito, que algunas de estas expresiones se usan en una variedad de registros más amplia que la expuesta en los diccionarios, y que una de las posibles explicaciones para la expansión del lenguaje es la «difusión léxica». Este estudio también apunta que algunas de las expresiones estudiadas podrían caer en desuso y sugiere seguir investigando la influencia náutica en inglés cotidiano hablado.

Palabras clave: jerga, náutico, siglo XVIII, expresión, modismo, lenguaje cotidiano, evolución, difusión léxica

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INTRODUCTION

The general objective of this study is to give an overview of the influence that the Royal Navy and life at sea in general have had on the English language. Currently, there are a large number of expressions in everyday language which have their origin in eighteenth-century naval life. Therefore, I aim to study this influence through some nautical expressions.

The structure of this study is the following: Section A, to contextualise the nautical expressions historically; Section B, to study the origin of fifteen nautical idioms and their meaning both now and then; Section C, to prove and confirm that this terminology is still in use by offering real examples in everyday language; Section D, to explain the reason why society has kept nautical terminology in the English language for two and a half centuries.

However, the order in which I have worked on this study does not coincide with the structure I have just explained. Firstly, I selected fifteen expressions with a nautical origin, classified them into different subject areas, and focused on their original meaning and usage and on their current meaning. Secondly, I proceeded to offer a historical contextualisation in order to understand life at sea and all of its operations afloat, as well as its importance in the eighteenth century to be able to understand the nautical idioms. Thereafter, I analysed the evolution of the English language, in accordance with linguistic theory, to discover how the nautical terminology entered the English language and when it was incorporated into everyday usage. Finally, for the last part, I found real examples of the expressions in everyday language to prove that they are still being used.

With this study I intend to show that there is old terminology in the English language that is still up to date in meaning, although most speakers do not know how old they are and where they come from.

SECTION A. LIFE AT SEA IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

According to dictionaries such as the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary or the Collins COBUILD Idioms Dictionary, there are naval terms still in use nowadays, and as there are many expressions of many different subjects, I am going to divide them into categories, like tasks, orders, punishments, food and booze, and weather. In the linguistic study that comes later, I will draw on expressions from these categories.

In order to contextualise this language and comprehend the division into categories, it is important to understand in general terms what kind of life people on board ship had, and especially the aspects of each category. I will therefore provide a brief description below of the reasons why joining the Royal Navy, the language that seamen used, their duties and routines on board, victuals and healthiness, and discipline.

1. Joining the Royal Navy

First of all, I would like to mention one of the most complete studies of naval life in the eighteenth century completed by N.A.M. Rodgers in his book *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*, which I have used as a reference for this study, due to the amount of relevant information that it contains. In addition to this book, but to a lesser degree, I have also used another important study on naval life by Dudley Pope, *Life in Nelson's Navy*.

Historically, the Royal Navy represents a massive empire that achieved a large number of historical milestones, but before analysing the language of the natives of this empire there is an important question about the Navy that is hardly ever asked. The question is why men decided to join the Navy or a merchant ship. Although today in the twenty-first century one may think they did it in order to have a career, the truth of that time was much simpler: "Men joined a King's ship or a merchant's as opportunity or preference suggested, and they moved easily from one to another. In peacetime the Navy was, from the point of view of a seaman in search of employment [...] a job like any other". (Rodger, 1987: 113)

There were some differences and similarities between the Royal Navy and merchant ships when it comes to the way they operated. Whether they applied for one or the other, seamen had to learn their tasks from boyhood so that “between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-four they had about seven years of experience at sea”. (Rodger, 1987: 114)

At first sight, life at sea was dangerous and tough and it also meant the separation of a boy from his family. But for boys the thought of sailing looked like a door to an unexplored and mysterious world, so that their mothers tried to avoid living near a harbour because it could make the boy fantasise with the idea of the navy. Men like boys found the chance of joining the navy attractive for various reasons; mainly because, as Rodger indicates, it offered highly paid wages in comparison with other jobs and also because spending time at sea was seen as an opportunity to “travel and see the world for the first time”. (Rodger, 1987: 115)

But once young men decided to join shipboard life, they tended to join a man-of-war instead of merchant ships “for economic reasons”, and also because “life aboard a warship was easier”. In a King’s ship the work that seamen had to do was lower in proportion with a merchant ship. All these relatively easier conditions triggered a higher rate of idlers in the Navy either in peace or war. (Rodger, 1987: 115-116)

If one gets a glimpse of the victuals that were available in a man-of-war and in a merchant ship, there is a clear difference between them, as Rodger describes, because in the first diets were plentiful and good and seamen did not starve, whereas in the latter victuals were short. In addition, in case of illness, merchantmen were not treated or provided with food if they stopped working because they could not undertake physical effort; their only hope was legal action, though it was not easy to be compensated. (Rodger, 1987: 117)

Other reasons why men chose to join the Navy and not merchant ships, were that the first offered the sailors: “[...] medical treatment, compensation for wounds, injuries and death, and the opportunity of a pension in old age. The most telling advantage of all was perhaps the prospects of advancement”. (Rodger, 1987: 117)

All these men who joined the Navy willingly were volunteers. “The recruitment of volunteers was the basic and the first method of recruitment, in peacetime the only one but even in wartime many men volunteered”. (Rodger, 1987: 153) However, there were two other means of recruitment onto a ship, which were, as described by Rodger, “pressed men and men turned over from other ships”.

(Rodger, 1987: 153) The latter method was similar to pressing men because what they did was to transfer the man who was in a King's ship or a merchant ship to the Navy. So it was sort of the same as pressing a man against his will with the only difference that he was already an active seaman.

The following chart shows the total of men who joined the Navy in different ways from January 1759 to June 1760:

| | <i>Able</i> | <i>Ordinary</i> | <i>Landmen</i> | <i>Totals</i> |
|------------------------|-------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Volunteered ashore | 41 | 35 | 32 | 108 |
| Volunteered afloat | 4 | 3 | 0 | 7 |
| Pressed ashore | 90 | 46 | 2 | 138 |
| Pressed afloat | 30 | 18 | 0 | 48 |
| Pressed by magistrates | 3 | 7 | 2 | 12 |
| Totals | 168 | 109 | 36 | 313 |

Rodger, 1987: 153 (Table 1)

Minorities were another source of volunteers for the Navy. For instance, Rodger asserts that some came from prisons but only the ones who had committed minor offences, like “smugglers or debtors”, were admitted. “Black people both slave and free, were another minority who contributed to the Navy”. (Rodger, 1987: 158-159)

It is popularly thought that the Royal Navy in the eighteenth century was a floating concentration camp because presumably seamen could not get leave in wartime. But this traditional interpretation is rejected by evidence showing that leave was frequent and general. In most of the cases the Admiralty gave leave because “it was necessary for seamen to recover their strength and health in order to be useful for the Navy”. (Rodger, 1987: 144) So usually leave was given with the intention that men returned after it and even if the admiral thought those men would desert. However, there is evidence that nearly all the men returned from their leave, which helps to back the idea that the Navy was not a floating concentration camp. Instead,

the Navy was a reasonable employer, which gave its men considerable liberty, and lost only a few in the process. Had it given less leave, it might well have lost more men, for in this as in so many other respects, the Navy kept the services of its ratings not by the exercise of an authority which was in reality very weak, but by offering attractive conditions and opportunities.¹

¹ Rodger, N.A.M., (1987), *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*, William Collins Sons & Co, Padstow, p.144.

In spite of the fact that the Navy was seen as an opportunity for many men for the reason that I have explained above, it should not be forgotten the sad reality of these young men in the eighteenth century, since the majority of them were, as asserted by (Rodger, 1987: 118), completely illiterate. Moreover, they were isolated from society at an early age. For all these reasons, they became a peculiar and unique class with their own customs, traditions, and their very own language learnt aboard.

2. The Language of Seamen

The language of seamen has been through a complex process of transformation, as will be analysed in Section B, which indicates that it had to be very relevant in society to persist in the language. For this reason, we first need to understand who seamen were in the eighteenth-century society.

Seamen were a sort of particular social class which lived isolated from mainstream society and, although they apparently spoke English it sounded like a peculiar and different language. There was such a significant difference that when they returned home from leave, their families, as well as other people living on land, felt “almost as if they were speaking another language rich in slang and colourful phrases”. (Pope, 2004: 177) Since relatives and fellows had to understand seamen, they had to learn the new language that they spoke. Undoubtedly, as I can confirm by Pope’s assertion “expressions which the sailor’s brother on shore understood and adapted to his own use” (Pope, 2004: 177), this fact led to an incorporation of many nautical expressions and descriptions into the current language. But naturally these expressions, when they were absorbed into the language, began to be used for other situations and, consequently, they acquired a different meaning over time. As explained in Section C, the fifteen selected nautical expressions have changed their meaning because they have been adapted in a way that can be applied to situations ashore, since their original meaning does not make sense any longer.

3. Duties and Routines

In order to understand some terminology in its original meaning, it is important to know what tasks were assigned to seamen, what a day at sea was like, and what their obligations were.

Contrary to what many people tend to believe, as shown in films and naval stories, seamen did not spend all the time at sea, not even most of it. "From 1757 to 1762 [...] the number of days British men-of-war spent at sea was 43 per cent of their total time in commission. The average ship spent more than half their time in port". For a ship to be in port meant to be "at anchor, relatively secure but often miles away from the shore, [nonetheless], to be in port offered an easier situation both for ships and their crews from those at sea". Being in port offered seamen the opportunity to sleep through the night, have days off, and more relaxation since their watches tended to be "reduced to only three". (Rodger, 1987: 37-39)

On merchant ships as on the King's ships, being places that gathered together a very large number of people, an excellent organisation and fixed timetables were needed in order to put everyone into operation and make everything work as it was supposed to. Therefore, one of the duties of sailors was to keep watches.

At sea, all seamen, landsmen, servants and petty officers kept two watches divided into two groups: the starboard and larboard watches. Each watch lasted four hours except two two-hour watches that were kept between four and eight in the evening. [...] The changing of the watch marked the passage of time aboard ship, where no clock would run. A petty officer [...] kept a half-hour sand-glass; when it turned, he rang the ship's bell, and at eight bells the watch changed. [...] At sea all those in watches had only four hours of sleep at most, and were liable to be awoken at any moment if an emergency required the watch. ²

With reference to Rodger's words, sailors suffered from a lack of sleep and, as a consequence, they tried to sleep by day if they had a chance without being caught by an officer. So it is a fact that "life on a King's ship was hard, but in any case it was easier than life on merchantmen" (Rodger, 1987: 40), due to the lesser amount of work that they had to do as a result of having a larger crew. We know this because the only reported seamen who suffered from exhaustion worked on merchantmen. "In port the work of the ship was generally lighter than at sea". (Rodger, 1987: 43)

Pope describes how days at sea, as much as in port, began in the darkness and the first duty of the day was to stow the hammocks where they slept and coil down the ropes. Afterward, seamen had to clean off the decks by scrubbing any marks and then they had breakfast. This was followed by the division of the tasks by parties, for example mending the sails, until dinner time at about 1p.m., although

² Rodger, N.A.M., *op. cit.*, p.39.

usually the captain and the officers ate a couple of hours later. In the afternoon, they generally continued doing some lighter tasks like clearing the decks and at 5p.m. supper was served. The last task of the day was to coil up the ropes and sweep the decks. Finally, they put the hammocks down again and the ship turned the lights out at about 8p.m., which marked the end of a normal day at sea (Pope, 2004: 166).

Apart from the duties of the ship, there was also time to do other activities. For instance an essential one was training ordinary seamen and landsmen, as well as young men who needed instruction, on knotting or splicing. In addition to the formal instruction, they all had to exercise daily. But the leisure activities which are the ones that actually helped entertain the crew were “music and dancing, playing board games like backgammon, [a fashion of the time], and reading, [which was probably the least known]”. It may be surprising to see reading among the activities that men did on board, but one must think that, despite most of them being illiterate, “there were ill-educated and even semi-illiterate [officers who had] some literary interests”. (Rodger, 1987: 44-45)

4. Victuals and Healthiness

Although it may not be the most noteworthy or famous aspect of naval life, there is a lot of terminology regarding victuals which was a fundamental aspect of seamen’s life because they could spend months at sea. Cleanliness was also vital for healthiness in a place where many people had to live together for several months.

4.1 Food and Drink

Victuals have always been fundamental to “happiness and good health. [...] In order to feed men at sea food had to be preserved for months, often for years” (Rodger, 1987: 82) So there were many limitations on the sorts of food that could be kept on board. Moreover, the best preserving methods required a specific machine which ensured that the quality of food, especially of the raw materials, to ensure a reliable supply to the Navy. The standard weekly rations of food issued by the Victualling Board were as in the following table:

| | <i>Bread</i> | <i>Beer</i> | <i>Beef</i> | <i>Pork</i> | <i>Pease</i> | <i>Oatmeal</i> | <i>Butter</i> | <i>Cheese</i> |
|-----------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| Sunday | 1 lb. | 1 gal. | — | 1 lb. | ½ pt. | — | — | — |
| Monday | 1 lb. | 1 gal. | — | — | — | 1 pt. | 2 oz. | 4 oz. |
| Tuesday | 1 lb. | 1 gal. | 2 lbs. | — | — | — | — | — |
| Wednesday | 1 lb. | 1 gal. | — | — | ½ pt. | 1 pt. | 2 oz. | 4 oz. |
| Thursday | 1 lb. | 1 gal. | — | 1 lb. | ½ pt. | — | — | — |
| Friday | 1 lb. | 1 gal. | — | — | ½ pt. | 1 pt. | 2 oz. | 4 oz. |
| Saturday | 1 lb. | 1 gal. | 2 lbs. | — | — | — | — | — ² |

Rodger, 1987: 83 (Table 2)

According to Rodger, the conventional preservation methods were: for bread to be baked and packed in bags, and for beef and pork to be salted and pickled in casks (a means of packing). Cheese, butter, flour, suet, raisins and vinegar were also in casks. If when casks were opened the contents had decayed, they were declared as unfit to eat. But, as the Victualling Boards shows, “in the period 1750-1757 there was no item of which more than 1 percent was unfit to eat, except for stockfish with almost 8 per cent”. (Rodger, 1987: 83-84) The diet, by modern standards, might seem poor and restricted, but it provided more than enough calories for the work of the ship. Moreover, by the standards of that time it was a plentiful and good diet because “to eat meat four days a week was itself a privilege denied a large part of the population”. (Rodger, 1987: 86) Andrew Lambert, after a trip to Australia on a replica of Captain Cook’s ship *Endeavour*, argued that, for what he had experienced, the eighteenth-century diet of the Royal Navy was better than he expected and in general life was “surprisingly decent”. (Lambert, 2011)

According to Rodger, the captain of a ship used to carry on board about six hundred gallons of spirits, and as nearly as much wine (Rodger, 1987: 73). There was no reason why the authorities of the ship would deny the men their liquor and trying to regulate its consumption was a waste of time. «Officers often gave their men spirits from their own supplies as a reward for work well done». The most habitual drinks were “beer, watered wine and watered spirits, usually rum and brandy”. (Rodger, 1987: 73) Drinking in excess “was not a reason for punishment but only a slight offence”. However, the rules were different at sea and in port. “At anchor most people could get drunk and most did; at sea some did, but the man who could not turn out when his watch was called, was very likely to be flogged. [...] Once at sea ships became relatively sober, which is perhaps the only reason why the Service survived the quantities of alcohol which were drunk aboard ship”. (Rodger, 1987: 74)

4.2 Cleanliness and Health

Cleanliness of British ships used to “make a good impression on foreign visitors” and that is because “the objective [of cleaning] was to purify the air [since] fresh air was the real essential for health”. Thus, the cleaning processes were to “wash the decks frequently”, ensure “clean air” throughout the ship and use “ventilators to purify the air below decks”. (Rodger, 1987: 105-106) When there was an outbreak of a contagious disease, the ship had to be disinfected with “warm vinegar”. The other key to good health was the “cleanliness of the men, and more particularly of their clothes” because at sea it was difficult for men to wash themselves, due to the “shortage of fresh water to spare”. Therefore clothes were normally washed with “urine, in the absence of soap, and rinsed afterwards with fresh water if it was possible”. When dirty clothes were suspected of being infected, they were burnt. (Rodger, 1987: 107)

All this cleanliness had a purpose, which was to defeat the real enemy of the Royal Navy, sickness. There were some precautions to be taken against illness in all climates, and especially in the heat, one of which was obviously “not working too hard, and preventing the men from drinking”. (Rodger, 1987: 108) Rodger asserts that “one of the most common diseases in the Navy was scurvy” which was a serious problem because it affected the efficiency of the crew though very few men actually died of it. The “difficulty was to find a cure”, but there were remedies such as lemons and other fruit since scurvy was a dietary disease caused by the absence of fresh victuals. For this reason, “from the spring of 1756 the Victualling Board began to issue fresh meat and vegetables to ships in port”. (Rodger, 1987: 100-101)

Another dangerous disease was “dysentery [which] was one of the most prevalent diseases”, and though it might not always been fatal, it was indeed the most unpleasant. Together with typhus they could be avoided by cleanliness. “The most dangerous was malignant yellow fever, which attacked suddenly and without warning”. (Pope, 2004: 137)

As a matter of fact, even though sailors had a slightly unhealthier life than their families living in land, they all suffered from similar illnesses but sailors were more likely to be cured because “if a sailor was ill, he could report sick and see the surgeon, but it was unlikely that his brother in a city could afford to see a doctor” (Pope, 2004: 148).

To conclude, the bottom line was that “sickness was dangerous for the Navy not so much from the absolute losses of men dead, as from the temporary loss of men ill, most of whom recovered” (Rodger, 1987: 104).

5. Discipline and Punishments

In a ship, with such limited space and many people, there had to be rules to obey, and ways to make sailors accomplish them. Since there were a lot of punishments and reprimands, the English language has inherited many terms expressions related to this subject.

The eighteenth century Navy tended to punish their men in a lighter way than on land because on board a King’s ship the ordinary law of the land was almost never admitted to run, just in extremely rare cases. The most frequently punished minor crimes on board were falling asleep on duty, refusing to follow orders or unclean behaviour. More serious crimes had to be taken to a court martial for judgment and, consequently, the punishment was more severe (Rodger, 1987: 218-219) but, bearing in mind that “the Navy was always short of men, the sentence of death was rare” (Pope, 1987: 215). Punishment was always rough and quick and carried out in public, in order to shame the guilty sailor, and the most common ones were “flogging and hanging”, the first one particularly. Flogging was inflicted with a cat of nine tails which consisted of a handle made of rope or wood the size of an average broom handle and nine whips. As the flogging ritual stated, the same cat was never used twice. (Pope, 1987: 213) The usual number of lashes inflicted for a minor offence was twelve, but it could increase up to seventy-two, depending on the officer in charge (Rodger, 1987: 220).

Punishment aboard was truly a blessing for the men compared to what could happen to the people ashore for committing a similar crime. “For an offence bringing a seaman a dozen or so lashes, his brother on land might spend a year in jail or be transported for life” (Pope, 2004: 220).

This section has offered a specific historical contextualisation related to the categories of the nautical terminology that will be analysed in the following sections.

SECTION B. LINGUISTIC STUDY OF FIFTEEN NAUTICAL EXPRESSIONS

In this section I am going to classify the nautical expressions into different categories and explain their origin, the target user in the past, and their current meaning in order to be able to compare the former and current usage and the register.

1. The Crew

1.1 Tasks

▪ **Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea**

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Origin | In wooden vessels, the 'devil' is thought to be the longest external plank of the ship, which runs from stem to stern. Once at sea, when the devil had to be made waterproof by a seaman, he was hung from a rope, suspended between the devil and the sea to do so. So it was the most dangerous task aboard ship. |
| Target user in the past | Sailors used this expression to refer to the dangerous position in which they were forced to be in order to reach the plank or "devil". |
| Current meaning | Currently it is a standard idiom with a mainly British usage that, according to the Collins Idioms Dictionary, means "to be in a difficult situation where the two possible courses of action or choices that you can take are equally bad". It is common to use the expression after the past participle 'caught', meaning trapped in a no win situation. |

▪ **Know/Learn the Ropes**

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Origin | In the past sailing vessels required miles and miles of rigging to be run. These ropes had many different functions and, therefore, sailors had to know which ropes moved or held what. This was mandatory for every single sailor aboard ship to learn but it was a tough task, so |
|---------------|---|

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| | when they finally learned, they became experienced sailors. |
| Target user in the past | The users of this idiom were seamen, who used it to define ordinary seamen learning the functions of all the ropes in a ship. |
| Current meaning | Today 'to know/learn the ropes' is an informal idiom used with a similar meaning. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary it means "to show somebody/know/learn how a particular job should be done". 'Know the ropes' can be used as well to talk about someone who already knows how to do a job or task. |

1.2 Orders

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| ▪ Cut and Run | |
| Origin | During warfare, when an anchored small ship encountered a larger vessel, the captain ordered the crew to apply an emergency action, which consisted of cutting the ship's anchor cable and sailing off in a hurry. |
| Target user in the past | The users of these expressions were the entire crew but more specifically the captain of the ship, who was the one to give the order. |
| Current meaning | Nowadays 'cut and run' is an informal idiom used in British English which, according to the Collins Idioms Dictionary, means "to suddenly escape from a difficult situation in order to avoid dealing with it in a responsible way". |

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| ▪ Toe the Line | |
| Origin | In a vessel the duties were carried out by the sailors but when the captain called the crew to 'toe the line' he called them to line up with their toes touching a mark in the deck planking. |
| Target user in the past | 'Toe the line' was used as an order by the captain of the vessel when he wanted to address the crew. |

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Current meaning | Currently this idiom is of standard usage and, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, means "to say or do what somebody in authority tells you to say or do, even if you do not share the same opinions, etc". |
|------------------------|--|

| ▪ Pipe Down | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Origin | The pipe down was the last daily signal from the bosun's pipe which meant the end of a day and an order to turn the lights out and to be quiet. |
| Target user in the past | It was a naval colloquialism, an official order from the boatswain not to talk so loud and be quiet. |
| Current meaning | 'To pipe down' is an informal phrasal verb with the exact same meaning from its naval origin. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, "it is used especially in order to tell somebody to stop talking or to be less noisy". |

1.3 Punishments

| ▪ Keelhauling | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Origin | Keelhauling was a severe naval punishment on board during the 15th and 16th centuries, said to have originated with the Dutch but adopted by other navies. The victim, supposedly a delinquent sailor, was repeatedly dragged from one side of the ship to the other, under the bottom of the vessel, named 'keel'. Normally the sailor was allowed to catch his breath before being tossed again. Keelhauling was replaced at the beginning of the 18th century by the cat o'nine tails. |
| Target user in the past | The term was used by the crew and the captain of the ship to make reference to this punishment. |
| Current meaning | Nowadays 'to keelhaul somebody' is, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, used in an |

informal and humorous situation and it means “to punish somebody very severely or speak very angrily to somebody”. So it still keeps the meaning of rough reprimand.

▪ No Room to Swing a Cat

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Origin | On sailing ships there was a punishment called <i>the cat o'nine tails</i> , named after the instrument that was used for it. The 'cat' in this expression was a whip with nine lashes. During the punishment the entire crew was called on deck to witness the flogging but the deck was so crowded that there was <i>no room to swing a cat</i> . This flogging method was carried out both in the Army and Navy and it was not abolished until 1948. |
| Target user in the past | It was presumably used by the bosun, who complained about not having enough space to swing his cat in front of the entire crew, who were required to witness the flogging. |
| Current meaning | Nowadays the idiom 'no room to swing a cat' has an informal usage and its meaning is pretty close to the original one. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, “when somebody says <i>there's no room to swing a cat</i> , they mean that a room is very small and that there is not enough space”. |

▪ Put/Have Someone Over a Barrel

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Origin | During the age of sail, sailors who were found guilty of some infraction would often be submitted to the most common punishment aboard ship: flogging. To do this, as the expression says, the sailor was bent and tied over the barrel of a deck cannon while he was flogged. |
| Target user in the past | It was presumably used by the entire crew to make reference to the punishment. |
| Current meaning | The current meaning of the informal idiom 'to put/have someone over a |

barrel' is, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, "to have/put someone in a situation in which they must accept or do what you want". In short, a person over a barrel is usually unable to act.

1.4 Food and Booze

| ▪ A Square Meal | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Origin | In the past, meals aboard ship were served to the crew on a square wooden plate. The quantity of food served was sufficient but its quality was not very good. Usually the crew ate fat from salt-cured beef or pork. |
| Target user in the past | Sailors used this term to refer to the meals they had aboard the ship. |
| Current meaning | At present, the meaning of the idiom 'a square meal' is completely different from its meaning in the past. To have 'a square meal' is now a synonym of a large satisfying and balanced meal that is filling. |

| ▪ Chew the Fat | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Origin | Seamen's meals were always the same and they were not particularly delicious. They consisted of a ration of tough salt-cured pork or beef, which took them a lot of chewing. As chewing took a long time, while they chewed the fat, they talked to each other. |
| Target user in the past | It was used, mainly among the crew because they were the ones who gathered together to eat. |
| Current meaning | 'Chew the fat' is today a British informal idiom that means, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, "to have a long friendly talk with somebody about something". |

| ▪ Slush Fund | |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|
| Origin | Back then in the age of sail, salted |

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| | meat was stored in barrels below decks. When one of these barrels had been finished off, the slushy mix of fat and salt which remained at the bottom of the barrel was boiled and resold once they arrived in port by the ship's cook. The money he obtained would often be used to buy luxuries for himself and the crew. This money was known as a 'slush fund'. |
| Target user in the past | It was used by the crew and the cook to talk about this secret money they made. |
| Current meaning | Today people refer to any sort of sum of money kept by a business for illegal activities or purposes as a 'slush fund'. This type of fund is also kept by political parties. |

▪ Three Sheets to the Wind

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Origin | On a boat, the three ropes that control the sails are called sheets. When these sheets were loose, the sails flapped wildly in the wind, often leading to an uncontrolled ship, as if it was drunk. The expression was also used back then to refer to drunkenness. When a sailor was a little tipsy, he was one sheet to the wind. If a sailor was considerably drunk, he was two sheets to the wind, while three sheets to the wind meant a sailor who could not stand on his own two feet. |
| Target user in the past | This expression was mainly used by the sailors but also by the rest of the crew to refer to a drunken member of the crew. |
| Current meaning | Currently the idiom 'three sheets to the wind' is considered old-fashioned but informal by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and it means to be drunk or intoxicated. |

2. Elements

2.1 Weather

| ▪ Back and Fill | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Origin | The nautical idiom 'to back and fill' refers to a technique of tacking the vessel when a tide is with the ship but the wind is against it. This maneuver with the sails allowed the ship to turn around in a very small area. |
| Target user in the past | Probably this expression was used by the bosun, who was the one in charge and could give orders to the rest of the crew. |
| Current meaning | Nowadays this idiom is considered old-fashioned and standard and, according to the Collins Idioms Dictionary, it means "to keep changing ones opinion or failing to make a decision". As we can see, the image of the term in its old sense, evoking something that quickly changes direction, is the same that it has in its current sense. |

| ▪ Batten Down the Hatches | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Origin | On a ship, when bad weather, especially a storm, was expected the crew proceeded to shut or batten down all the openings in the deck of a ship, also called hatches and any other entrance in order to protect the inside of the ship from water. |
| Target user in the past | It was used by the crew and the officers as a warning that a storm was coming. |
| Current meaning | At present, as the Collins Idioms Dictionary defines it, 'to batten down the hatches' is a standard idiom that means "to prepare for a difficult situation by doing everything you can to protect yourself". |

| ▪ Taken Aback | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Origin | At sea in the days of sailing, when a ship was sailing into the wind, the wind blew the sails back against the mast, putting the ship in danger of having the masts broken by the wind. It was said that the ship was taken aback. |
| Target user in the past | This expression was presumably used |

by the entire crew, including the ship's officers.

Current meaning

This idiom is currently used in a standard situation and, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary it means "to be shocked by something or somebody".

In all these expressions I've observed a common pattern. It turns out that currently most of them are idioms used in informal situations. This makes me think about it and draw a provisional conclusion about the reason why these idioms are informal. Given the fact that seamen, who were recruited and pressed into service, were mainly from humble families made up most of the crew, the way they spoke while they were at sea for long seasons influenced the language of their families when they came back home. Thus this nautical slang was slowly transferred and incorporated in the English everyday language, which ordinary people spoke, and it has persisted until our days because people has continued using the expressions.

SECTION C. NAUTICAL JARGON IN USE

The objective of this section is to provide examples of the fifteen nautical expressions currently in use to prove that they have persisted in the English language for more than two centuries and are still in force. This section will also allow me to see which of the idioms are the most or the least used and if any of them is slowly starting to vanish from the language.

1. Hits on Google

I searched for fifteen expressions on Google once for the single form idioms, and twice or more for the ones with more than one form (e.g. know the ropes; learn the ropes) and noted down the hits that I obtained each search.

The reason why I did this pre-search was to get an overview of the number of times that these expressions are used on Google and to see which of them could be, at first sight, the most well-known. I also did this pre-search on Google to see, in the cases where there is more than one possible form, which is the one with most hits, in order to use it for a more accurate search in the following step of this study.

For each expression, I noted down its hits on Google, and commented of the type of content given in the first three links. All the searches were made without quotation marks in order to see how many results Google gave in all possible concordances, although this procedure may have lead to a more imprecise search. All the hits were checked on 10th May 2015 and the results are as follows in descending order of frequency.

| Expression | Number of hits | Sources |
|----------------------|----------------|---|
| Back and Fill | 285 Million | 1. Idioms dictionary 2. Navigation's website 3. Standard dictionary |
| Cut and Run | 263 Million | 1. Wikipedia 2. Book-review site 3. Website with interviews |
| Toe the Line | 91.9 Million | 1. Wikipedia 2. Standard dictionary 3. Facts website similar to |

| | | |
|--|--------------|---|
| | | Wikipedia |
| Put Someone Over a Barrel | 72.8 Million | 1. Idioms dictionary 2. Idioms dictionary 3. Standard dictionary |
| Have Someone Over a Barrel | 36.6 Million | 1. Idioms dictionary 2. Idioms dictionary 3. Idioms dictionary |
| Pipe Down | 44.4 Million | 1. Idioms dictionary 2. Idioms dictionary 3. Idioms dictionary |
| A Square Meal | 42.9 Million | 1. Idioms dictionary 2. Idioms dictionary 3. Standard dictionary |
| No Room to Swing a Cat | 24.4 Million | 1. Idioms dictionary 2. Idioms dictionary 3. Idioms dictionary |
| Know The Ropes | 16.5 Million | 1. Standard dictionary 2. Idioms dictionary 3. Idioms dictionary |
| Learn The Ropes | 7.04 Million | 1. Standard dictionary 2. Idioms dictionary 3. Facts website similar to Wikipedia 2. Idioms dictionary 3. Idioms dictionary |
| Chew the Fat | 14.9 Million | 1. Wikipedia 2. Idioms dictionary 3. Standard dictionary |
| Taken Aback | 6.13 Million | 1. Standard dictionary 2. Idioms dictionary 3. Thesaurus |
| Three Sheets to the Wind | 2.13 Million | 1. Facts website similar to Wikipedia 2. Idioms dictionary 3. Idioms dictionary |
| Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea | 1.49 Million | 1. Wikipedia 2. Standard dictionary 3. Book-review website |
| Slush Fund | 640,000 | 1. Wikipedia 2. Standard dictionary 3. Economic encyclopaedia |
| Batten Down the Hatches | 449,000 | 1. Idioms dictionary 2. Idioms dictionary 3. Facts website similar to Wikipedia |
| Keelhauling | 160,000 | 1. Wikipedia 2. Youtube |

| | | |
|--------------------|---------|---|
| To keelhaul | 164,000 | 3. Website of curiosities 1. Wikipedia 2. Wikipedia 3. Idioms dictionary |
|--------------------|---------|---|

The general and provisional conclusion that could be drawn from this data is that the three most used nautical idioms of the fifteen analysed are ‘back and fill’, ‘cut and run’, and ‘toe the line’; and the least used are ‘slush fund’, ‘batten down the hatches’ and ‘to keelhaul’. Moreover, the first three links reflect that many people, both native and non-native English speakers, search in dictionaries to unveil the unknown and old meaning of the idioms or even their origin. In the following section, we will see if the hits match the actual usage in language.

2. Idioms in Use

For this second step in the study, the sources of examples were selected from the first five pages of results on Google unless stated otherwise, and the expressions were searched for in inverted commas. For the specific case of ‘have/put someone over a barrel’, I typed an asterisk instead of ‘someone’ to obtain a wider range of combinations and sources containing the expressions in use. By examining the first five pages, I aimed to obtain the most recent usage of the idioms.

I followed a set procedure: I found three examples of each expression in use and analysed the register in which it is used, if it is American or British English, whether its current usage matches or differs from the standard dictionary usage, and the context of the extract. The source of each extract is supplied below in a footnote. With this information, I made a hypothesis of its use by English speakers.

| ▪ Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea | | |
|---|--|---|
| “‘When you're in Libya, you're between the Devil and the deep blue sea’, he said, referring to the | “Norway’s oil fund caught between the devil and deep blue sea”. ⁴ | “You think you might cross over, You're caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, |

threats faced by migrants".³

You better look it over,
Before you make that leap".⁵

We can see that the first two examples are used in a formal register, as they appear in British economic publications, and the third is used in an informal register because it is part of the words of a song by the American band The Killers. As stated in the Collins Idioms Dictionary, it is true that the use is mainly British and, as seen in these cases, I can affirm that this expression is widely known by native English speakers and alive in the language, as the target audience is different in each case. The meaning is, in all cases, the modern one but the register varies from formal to informal, whilst in Collins it is defined as a standard idiom.

▪ Know the Ropes

"Hoping to prevent some of these tragic accidents, the 2013 edition of *Accidents* focuses on lowering in its annual **Know the**

"Safety experts know the ropes of paragliding".⁷

"Dames Who Know the Ropes" is a series of masterclass workshops led by established female practitioners from across the performing arts".⁸

3 Buchanan, E., (2015), "Italy migrants influx: Libya is living hell somewhere 'between the Devil and the deep blue sea'", *International Business Times*, [online] in <<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/italy-migrants-influx-libya-living-hell-somewhere-between-devil-deep-blue-sea-1496587>> [consulted: 11th May

4 Milne, R., (2014), "Norway's oil fund caught between the devil and the deep blue sea", *Financial Times*, [online] in <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/20ca2e6c-a257-11e3-87f6->

5 Flowers, B., Keuning, D., *et al.*, (2008), "Spaceman", The Killers, Island

6 Climbing Staff, (2013), "Know the Ropes: Prevent Lowering Accidents", *Climbing Blog*, [online] in <<http://www.climbing.com/blog/know-the-ropes->

7 "Safety experts know the ropes of paragliding", (1995), *Times Higher Education*, [online] in <<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/safety-experts-know-the-ropes-of-paragliding/94585.article>> [consulted: 11th May 2015]

For ‘know the ropes’ these are three similar uses. The first one is the name of a section in an American blog, which gives tips for developing a task well, and it is also used as a metaphor because it explains how to use ropes for climbing purposes. The second example, which is from a British website, has a very similar meaning related to expertise, and the last one is the name of a circus master class announced in an Australian website, which, apparently consists of practising to be in the circus. All three are used in the modern sense and in an informal register, which coincides with the definition given by Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, although it is possibly not very common in everyday language, as the contexts are specialised.

▪ Cut and Run

“Don't cut and run this year’, the world's largest asset manager, BlackRock, advised clients Monday to “resist the urge to exit” as stock market fluctuations increase in 2015”.⁹

“When Reagan Cut and Run”¹⁰

“He's a man in the wrong with a gun at his head, Pushes on and now it's time to cut and run”.¹¹

In the first two examples, the context in which the idiom is used is standard, though the expression may sound a little informal, and the usage is similar because the information is on political and financial news; in both of them the sense is the modern one, and contrary to what Collins Idioms

8 “Dames Who Know the Ropes”, *Women's circus*, [online] in <<http://www.womenscircus.org.au/training/performance-and-theatre-workshops/>> [consulted: 11th May 2015]

9 Melloy, J., (2015), “Don't cut and run this year: Blackrock”, *CNBC* [online] in <<http://www.cnbc.com/id/102306093>> [consulted: 11th May 2015]

10 Zenko, M., (2014), “When Reagan Cut and Run”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, [online] in <<http://www.cfr.org/lebanon/reagan-cut-run/p32354>> [consulted: 11th May 2015]

11 Allen, C., Cann, W., et al., (1982), “Cut and Run”, *Ultravox, Chrysalis*, 04:18.

Dictionary o indicated, it is used in American English. The third extract is from a song by the British band Ultravox and its register is informal, due to its usage in a song that anybody can listen to, and the sense is also the modern one. The register of the latter extract coincides with the definition offered by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.

▪ Toe the Line

“Media in Japan under growing pressure to toe the line”¹²

“China orders square dancers to heel and toe the line”¹³

“Toe the line, It'll only hurt, What are you trying to hide, When you go swimming against the tide.”¹⁴

All three examples are in British English and in a standard register, which agrees with the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary's assertion, and the modern sense of obey is the same for all. The two first extracts are news headlines regarding politics and the third one is the title of an 80's song and also a part of its lyrics. In general, it seems that the expression is known by most speakers, at least in Britain, since it is used in the press and in a song that can be understood by anybody.

▪ Pipe Down

“Pipe down, Siri, car talk isn't a very safe driving habit”¹⁵

“Adam Afriyie isn't helping the Eurosceptic cause. He should pipe down”¹⁶

“Pipe down and embrace Carmelo Anthony's All-Star moment”¹⁷

‘Pipe down’, unlike all the other expressions, is a phrasal verb that in these examples is always used in headlines about different subjects with an informal register, as stated in Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, regardless of whether the article is more formal. The first and the third one are written in American English 12 Ryal, J., (2015), “Media in Japan under growing pressure to toe the line”, DW, [online] in <<http://www.dw.de/media-in-japan-under-growing-pressure-to-toe-the-line/a-18420514>> [consulted: 16th May 2015]

13 Agence France-Presse in Beijing, (2015), “China orders square dancers to heel and toe the line”, *The Guardian*, [online] in <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/24/china-orders-square-dancers-to-heel-and-toe-the-line>> [consulted: 16th May 2015]

14 Hackett, S., Howe, S., (1986), “Toe the Line”, GTR, Arista, 4:29.

▪ To Keelhaul

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>“Poland in no rush to keelhaul its pirates, even after Dutch download ban”¹⁸</p> | <p>“Wenches On Street-Legal Pirate Ship Ready To Keelhaul Denver”¹⁹</p> | <p>“Pirates set to keelhaul rivals”²⁰</p> |
|---|--|--|

For this expression, the three examples that I have found are all headlines; the first one in British English, and the others American. The first example is from an article about politics, therefore it is written in a standard register. The second headline is from local news in a blog, which makes its register colloquial and the meaning of the article is figurative, as it refers to a local party. The last one is from a sports' section in a newspaper which is about bowling and the 'Pirates' of the headline are just a team, so the meaning of 'keelhaul' is also figurative and the register is standard. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, the register in which it

15 Plummer, Q., (2014), “Pipe down, Siri, car talk isn’t a very safe driving habit”, *Tech Times*, [online] in <<http://www.techtimes.com/articles/17389/20141007/car-talk-isnt-safest-driving-habit-downright-dangerous.htm> > [consulted: 17th May 2015]

16 Rees-Mogg, J., (2013), “Adam Afriyie isn’t helping the Eurosceptic cause. He should pipe down”, *The Telegraph*, [online] in <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/conservative/10366268/Adam-Afriyie-isnt-helping-the-Eurosceptic-cause.-He-should-pipe-down.html> > [consulted: 17th May 2015]

17 Vaccaro, M., (2015), “Pipe down and embrace Carmelo Anthony’s All-Star moment”, *New York Post*, [online] in <<http://nypost.com/2015/02/13/pipe-down-and-embrace-carmelo-anthonys-all-star-moment/>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

18 Blommestein, M. van, (2014), “Poland is in no rush to keelhaul its pirates, even after Dutch download ban”, *ZDNet*, [online] in <<http://www.zdnet.com/article/poland-in-no-rush-to-keelhaul-its-pirates-even-after-dutch-download-ban/>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

19 Martin, M., (2010), “Wenches on Street-Legal Pirate Ship Ready to Keelhaul Denver”, *Jalopnik*, [online] in <<http://jalopnik.com/5594791/wenches-on-street-legal-pirate-ship-ready-to-keelhaul-denver>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

20 “Pirates set to keelhaul rivals”, (2015), *Pine Rivers Press*, [online] in <<http://quest.newspaperdirect.com/epaper/viewer.aspx>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

is used is informal but, as seen in these extracts, it also has a standard usage. To sum up, in all the examples the sense is similar to the one of rough reprimand but only in the first case is it used literally. In accordance with the amount of results that I have obtained for this expression and its usage, I presume that it is hardly ever used in everyday English.

▪ No Room to Swing a Cat

“No room to swing a cat? Well you can buy enough room to swing a cat in London, but you’ll have to pay out a big sum for it according to a new online interactive”.²¹

“As the famous saying goes to describe a small, cramped space, ‘there’s not enough room to swing a cat’”.²²

“When Tommy complains to his mother that his room is so small there isn't even room to swing a cat, she comes up with a solution[...]”.²³

All the extracts are from sources written in British English and in a standard register, and the meaning is related to the space inside a house or part of it, similar to the original sense. The two first examples are from articles in the online press about small housing in London and Hong Kong. The last one is perhaps a little more informal, as it is a children’s book, but still the usage is the same. The register of these extracts is standard and informal, which extends the informal register stated in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. Apparently it is a commonly known idiom by people of all ages, although maybe restricted to British English speakers.

▪ Put Someone Over a Barrel

“UConn women likely to put Creighton over a barrel”²⁴

“Shortages put whisky distillers over a barrel”²⁵

“President calls for people power to help put the gun lobby over a barrel”²⁶

²¹ Leach, A., (2015), “This is how much room to swing a cat will cost you in London”, *Mirror*, [online] in <<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/ampp3d/how-much-room-swing-cat-5397322>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

²² “No room to swing a cat: what life might look like in one of Hong Kong’s new 177sqft flats”, (2014), *South China Morning Post*, [online] in <<http://www.scmp.com/article/1556719/no-room-swing-cat-what-life-might-look-177sqft-flat>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

²³ Steadman, R., (1989), *No Room to Swing a Cat*, Andersen Press, London, [back cover].

For this idiom, the examples that I have found are all part of headlines in a standard register, which differs from the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary's definition that classifies it as an informal idiom. The first one is from an American sports website about a basketball match, and the other two are business and political articles from renowned newspapers in British English. In all of the cases, the meaning is to have no way out of a specific situation and due to its extended use in the press, it looks like a common expression in English.

▪ A Square Meal

“Just as we often fail on providing the perfect ingredients we know that are needed for a ‘square meal,’ we

“A square meal - Left or right hand?”²⁸

“Have a square meal with Boston brown bread”²⁹

24 Fuller, J., (2014), “UConn women likely top ut Creighton over a barrel”, *New Haven Register*, [online] in <<http://www.nhregister.com/sports/20141122/uconn-women-likely-to-put-creighton-over-a-barrel>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

25 Speedy, B., (2014), “Shortages put whisky distillers over a barrel”, *The Australian*, [online] in <<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/shortages-put-whisky-distillers-over-a-barrel/story-e6frg8zx-1226991490360>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

26 Taylor, D., (2013), “President calls for people power to help put the gun lobby over a barrel”, *The Times*, [online] in <<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/americas/article3677064>. ece > [consulted: 17th May 2015]

27 “Square Meal: Why we need a new recipe for farming, wildlife, food and public health”, (2014), *Food Research Collaboration*, [online] in <<http://foodresearch.org.uk/square-meal/>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

28 Sarkar, K., (2014), “A square meal- Left or right hand?”, *Business Standard*, [online] in <http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/keya-sarkar-a-square-meal-left-or-right-hand-114122601087_1.html> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

29 Borrelli, C., (2015), “Have a square meal with Boston Brown bread”, *Star2.com*, [online] in <<http://www.star2.com/food/recipes/2015/05/10/a-square-meal-with-boston-brown-bread/>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

For this idiom, the usages that I have found are all in a standard register, which agrees with the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary's definition, and its meaning is related to food, like its current meaning of large and balanced meal. On the one hand, the first two extracts are written in British English and the third in American. On the other hand, the first one is found in a text and the other two in article headlines. In accordance with these contexts, it appears to be a habitual idiom in everyday language.

▪ Chew the Fat

“Here our top team of Keith Jackson, David McCarthy and Gary Ralston chew the fat as they look back on the win over Northern Ireland - and ahead to that showdown with the UK territory”.³⁰

“The Bannos brothers chew the fat”³¹

“Researchers chew the fat on merits of the Atkins diet”³²

The sources where I have found this expression are quite different from each other. The first example is from a British sports newspaper and the register varies between standard and informal. The second source is an American radio show podcast headline with an informal register. And the last one, which is also an American headline, has a standard register and is about diets. In these cases, the sense corresponds to the current meaning of the idiom, as given in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: to have a relaxed chat, and it looks like it is commonly used by English speakers, but the register stated in the dictionary is only informal whereas it may also be standard, like in these cases.

30 Record Sport Online, (2015), “Watch out top team look ahead to Scotland’s Gibraltar crunch and chew the fat on Ranger’s Toon Five”, *Daily Record*, [online] in <<http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/sport/football/football-news/watch-top-team-look-ahead-5405918>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

31 Cooper, J., (2015), “The Bannor brothers chew the fat”, *WGNradio*, [online] in <<http://wgnradio.com/2015/04/17/the-bannos-brothers-chew-the-fat/>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

32 Hellmich, N., (2002), “Researchers chew the fat on merits of the Atkins diet”, *USA Today*, [online] in <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/health/2002-08-06-atkins_x.htm> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

▪ Slush Fund

“It seems like the Clinton Foundation operates as a slush fund for the Clintons,” said Bill Allison”.³³

“But gradually, OCO evolved into an all-purpose slush fund for the military, members of Congress and the Bush and Obama administrations”.³⁴

“Switzerland will return \$6.74 million to Taiwan from a slush fund used by the island's graft-tainted former president Chen Shui-bian [...]”.³⁵

The expression ‘slush fund’ is mostly used in economic and political contexts. The first two extracts in which I have found it are American websites with a standard to formal register and the third one is British and uses the same register, which coincides with the one indicated in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. In the three examples, the meaning of the idiom is a hidden sum of money kept for illegal purposes, so it is closely related to the original nautical meaning and still in force.

▪ Three Sheets to the Wind

“A squirrel three sheets to the wind: It’s Friday afternoon, and I can’t brain very well, so we’ll have animal videos. How about a drunk squirrel?”³⁶

“After her release she returned home where she found her husband Charlie "worse for wear" as he had been stressed and drinking red wine. ‘He was three sheets to the wind’,

“Ian Marchant's *The Longest Crawl* and Pete Brown's *Three Sheets to the Wind* are not merely about the fascinating world of beer [...]”.³⁸

33 Benson, G., (2015), “Watchdog: Let’s Face It, the Clinton Foundation is Basically a ‘Slush Fund’”, *Townhall.com*, [online] in <<http://townhall.com/tipsheet/guybenson/2015/04/27/charity-watchdog-clinton-foundation-a-slush-fund-n1991083>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

34 Pianin, E., (2015), “Pentagon’s \$90 Billion ‘Slush Fund’ Comes Under Attack”, *The Fiscal Times*, [online] in <<http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/2015/05/08/Pentagon-s-90-Billion-Slush-Fund-Comes-Under-Attack>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

35 “Swiss to return ‘slush fund’ money to Taiwan”, (2015), *The Local*, [online] in <<http://www.thelocal.ch/20150429/swiss-to-return-slush-fund-money-to-taiwan>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

36 Coyne, J., (2015), “A squirrel three sheets to the wind”, *Why Evolution Is True*, [online] in <<https://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2015/03/06/a-squirrel-three-sheets-to-the-wind-2/>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

Brooks said".³⁷

For this idiom, as it is a little old-fashioned, I needed to examine more Google results' pages (a total of 9) to obtain the three examples in use that I required, since most of the results were just explanations of the idiom. The first example is from an American website and its register is very informal, as well as its content in general. The second extract is from a British article on a newspaper with a standard register. The third and last one is a book review with a standard register from a book with the same title about beer by a British writer. These cases back the fact that this idiom can also be used in a standard register, which contradicts the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary because it only defines it as an informal expression. The meaning of the three cases is related to drunkenness, exactly like in the original sense, but the idiom appears to be becoming obsolete.

▪ Back and Fill

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "Market Could 'Back and Fill' Before Moving Higher"³⁹ | "QQQ Update, Strong But Expecting Back and Fill Soon"⁴⁰ | "How Will the Current Back and Fill Price Action Resolve Itself?"⁴¹ |
|---|---|---|

This idiom in these examples is used in headlines, and all of them are American financial sources, therefore their register

37 Doleman, J., (2014), "Phone-hacking trial: Resignations, panda cars and three sheets to the wind", *The Drum*, [online] in <<http://www.thedrum.com/opinion/2014/03/04/phone-hacking-trial-resignations-panda-cars-and-three-sheets-wind>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

38 Sansom, I., (2006), "Whose round is it anyway?", *The Guardian*, [online] <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/aug/12/travel.travelbooks>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

39 Fox, M., (2013), "Market Could 'Back and Fill' Before Moving Higher", *NBR*, [online] in <<http://nbr.com/2013/07/12/market-could-back-and-fill-before-moving-higher-bob-doll/>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

40 Nyquist, A., (2012), "QQQ Update, Strong But Expecting Back and Fill Soar", *See It Market*, [online] in <<http://www.seeitmarket.com/chartology-qqq-update-strong-but-expecting-back-and-fill-soar/>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

41 Man, N., (2009), "How Will The Current Back and Fill Price Action Resolve Itself?", *Wall Street Pit*, [online] in <<http://wallstreetpit.com/5160-how-will-the-current-back-and-fill-price-action-resolve-itself/>> [consulted: 17th May 2015]

is specialised standard, which agrees with the Collins Idioms Dictionary's definition. The meaning is of uncertainty when making a decision. This information shows that probably 'back and fill' is not known by a wide range of speakers because it is mostly used in financial jargon.

▪ Batten Down the Hatches

"Batten Down The Hatches Folks, The Greek Situation Just Keeps Getting Worse"⁴²

"Evans, whose side repelled Brighton's efforts to get back into the game on the restart, said: "We had to batten down the hatches, get a result and we've done that".⁴³

"Batten down the hatches! Subtropical Storm Ana expected to become tropical storm on 9 May"⁴⁴

In all three cases, the source of the examples is British English and their register, standard, as stated in the Collins Idioms Dictionary. What varies from one example to the other is the context in which it is used. The first context is financial, the second one is sports and the last one is the weather, with a very close meaning to the original expression. But all cases keep the meaning of preparing for an unpleasant situation and suggest that the idiom is often used in everyday speech.

▪ Taken Aback

42 Worstall, T., (2015), "Batten Down The Hatches Folks, The Greek Situation Just Keeps Getting Worse", *Forbes*, [online] in <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/timworstall/2015/05/05/batten-down-the-hatches-folks-the-greek-situation-just-keeps-getting-worse/>> [consulted: 18th May 2015]

43 "Rotherham United: Millers had to batten down the hatches: Evans", (2015), *The Yorkshire Post*, [online] in <<http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/sport/football/rotherham/rotherham-united-millers-had-to-batten-down-the-hatches-evans-1-7195993>> [consulted: 18th May 2015]

44 Rojas, N., (2015), "Batten down the hatches! Subtropical Storm Ana expected to become tropical storm on 9 May", *International Business Times*, [online] in <<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/batten-down-hatches-subtropical-storm-ana-expected-become-tropical-storm-9-may-1500436>> [consulted: 18th May 2015]

“There has always been 46,000-plus there. For a player to come out and ask the fans still to support them, I was a bit taken aback and disappointed in that”.⁴⁵

“Mara Taken Aback By Negative Surrounding New ‘Fantastic Four’ Film”⁴⁶

“Nice to have once in a while,
You mean more to me than I could ever tell.
So sorry that I'm taken aback,
But I just can't help it”.⁴⁷

The expression ‘taken aback’ is very versatile and in these examples it is used in different contexts. The first one is from a sports section of a British newspaper and has a standard register. The second example is from a headline of an American television channel interview and its register is also standard. The last one is taken from a song by an American band with the same title and it has an informal register. The sense is in all cases of surprise and it is commonly known and used by many English speakers. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary states that the register of ‘taken aback’ is only standard but these cases prove that it can also be informal.

The results of this part of the study allowed me to contrast the usage of the nautical idioms with the number of hits on Google and to check whether a high number of hits really corresponded to wide usage of the term. In fact, the two analyses did not correspond. Whereas the Google hits suggested that ‘back and fill’, ‘cut and run’, and ‘toe the line’ were the most widely-used expressions, my second analysis suggests that ‘slush fund’, ‘taken aback’, and ‘between the devil and the deep blue sea’ are the most commonly used.

45 Hardy, M., (2015), “Alan Shearer ‘taken aback’ at plea by Fabricio Coloccino To Newcastle fans”, *The Independent*, [online] in <<http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/premier-league/alan-shearer-taken-aback-at-plea-by-fabricio-coloccini-to-newcastle-fans-10237898.html>> [consulted: 18th May 2015]

46 Damore, M., (2015), “Mara Taken Aback By Negativity Surrounding New ‘Fanstastic Four’ Film”, *Comic Book Resources*, [online] in <<http://www.comicbookresources.com/article/mara-taken-aback-by-negativity-surrounding-new-fantastic-four-film>> [consulted: 18th May 2015]

47 Avary, B., (2007), “Taken Aback”, *The Rocket Summer*, Island Records, 03:44.

On the contrary, due to scarce information mentioning them, the three least common would be ‘to keelhaul’, ‘three sheets to the wind’, and ‘know the ropes’, of which just ‘to keelhaul’ matches the least common expressions suggested by the Google hits. Perhaps these idioms have started to become meaningless because of the distance from the original context and the meaning. However, the three most used, in accordance with the analysis, have adopted a completely different meaning and speakers may not think of the naval life when they use them. The comparative tables below offer a visual explanation of this.

| Expressions (Top 3) | Google hits | Second analysis |
|--|--|----------------------------------|
| Back and Fill | Many hits, 1 st on the list | Few references, restricted usage |
| Cut and Run | Many hits, 2 nd on the list | Some references, average usage |
| Toe the Line | Many hits, 3 rd on the list | Some references, average usage |
| Taken Aback | Few hits, 10 th on the list | Many references, wide usage |
| Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea | Few hits, 12 th on the list | Many references, wide usage |
| Slush Fund | Few hits, 13 th on the list | Many references, wide usage |

| Expressions (Bottom 3) | Google hits | Second analysis |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Know the Ropes | Some hits, 8 th on the list | Less references, restricted usage |
| Three Sheets to the Wind | Few hits, 11 th on the list | Less references, restricted usage |
| Slush Fund | Less hits, 13 th on the list | Some references, average usage |
| Batten Down the Hatches | Less hits, 14 th on the list | Some references, average usage |
| To Keelhaul | Less hits, 15 th on the list | Less references, little usage, disused |

Taking a look at the classification into fields of the expressions in Section B, I can assert that at least one of each field still matches its current meaning with the original one and the field classification has

not changed, whilst the other idioms do not have much to do with their original meaning. The cases in which not the meaning nor the classification field have changed are: 'know the ropes' is related to a task, 'pipe down' and 'toe the line' still correspond to orders, 'to keelhaul' keeps the sense of punishment, 'three sheets to the wind' is how a person is when he/she is in a state of drunkenness, and finally 'batten down the hatches', which apart from figurative senses is used to talk about bad weather. The following table illustrates these cases:

| | Field back then and now | Original meaning | 21st century meaning | Changes |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Know the Ropes | Tasks | To learn how the functions of all the ropes aboard. | To know how a particular job should be done. | - Task generalised - Same meaning |
| Pipe Down | Orders | An order to take the lights out and to be quiet at the end of a day. | To tell somebody to be quiet. | - Lost reference to a pipe - Same meaning |
| Toe the Line | Orders | An order to line up with the sailor's toes touching a mark. | To say or do what a person in authority tells you to do. | - Lost reference of touching a line with the toes - Same meaning |
| To Keelhaul | Punishments | To suppress a specific severe punishment on board. | To punish somebody severely or to speak angrily. | - Lost reference to a keel - Same meaning |
| Three Sheets to the Wind | Food and Booze | To refer to a drunkenness state of a seaman. | To be drunk. | - Same meaning |
| Batten Down the Hatches | Weather | When bad weather was expected and the crew got the ship | To prepare for a difficult situation by protecting yourself. | - Lost reference to a hatch - Same meaning |

Overall, most of the examples that I have found use the expression in headlines of articles. This fact, on the one hand, helps to prove that the usage is up to date, as most of the articles are recent. On the other hand, it may indicate that these idioms are more appropriate to catch the reader's attention precisely because they are old sayings that most people recognize. Fewer examples, but a significant number nevertheless, are from songs, which highlights the point that when idioms are part of the general language, they are incorporated into a song that many people will sing, and thus the idiom secures its continuing in the language.

The last aspect that I would like to stress is the change of register. Most expressions were classified in dictionaries as informal, but real texts have proved that the usage they are given nowadays by speakers is much wider, and some of them are even used in formal and specialised registers. This means that over time, the register of these idioms has risen in many cases to standard or even formal English.

SECTION D. PROCESSES OF EVOLUTION IN LANGUAGE

As I have previously mentioned in Section A: *2.The language of seamen*, in this section I am going to explain, in detail and supported by the arguments of renowned linguists, some of the lexical processes in language: how vocabulary changes over time, how new words enter a language and old words fall into disuse, and the difference between a language and a dialect, among others. With these theoretical arguments, and due to a lack of terminology research in the field of nautical vocabulary, I will present my own theory about how and why such old expressions survived centuries.

1. The ‘Language of Seamen’ - a Dialect or Jargon?

When we talk about the ‘language of seamen’, it may seem that we are talking about a language other than English but, in fact, that is not true. So at this point, It is useful to explain the difference between a language and a dialect and whether the so-called ‘language of seamen’ should be given another name. The linguist David Crystal provides a very clear explanation of how a language differs from a dialect.

The difference between Cockney, Scouse, and Geordie, for example, may be considerable, but, when speakers of these dialects speak slowly, people from other English dialect backgrounds can understand most of what is said; and when such dialects are written down, the similarities differences with standard English stand out even more clearly. Correspondingly, the differences between dialects of English and dialects belonging to other languages are also easy to perceive. No matter how slowly a speaker of Spanish speaks, and no matter how it is written down, English speakers will not understand it —unless they have taken the trouble to learn Spanish, of course. But they can understand a great deal of Cockney, Scouse, and Geordie without having to learn it.⁴⁸

In accordance with this statement, it is obvious that seamen did not speak a dialect. However, only a particular group of people of a trade (the crew of a ship) used this specific terminology, which means that it has a restricted usage, usually colloquial. So we could more properly talk about ‘nautical slang’ or ‘nautical jargon’. The lexicographer Sir James Murray in the introduction to the *Oxford*

48 Crystal, D., (2007), *How Language Works*, Penguin Books, London, p.329.

English Dictionary explains the divisions of vocabulary and clarifies what slang refers to:

The centre [of language] is occupied by (common) words, in which literary and colloquial usage meet. 'Scientific', 'foreign', and 'archaic' words are the specially learned outposts of the literary language; 'technical' and 'dialectal' words blend with the common language both in speech and in literature. 'Slang' touches the technical terminology of trades and occupations, as in 'nautical slang'.⁴⁹

Now that the designation is clear, I will proceed to explain a few ways that new words are incorporated into a language that will give a better idea as to how nautical slang was slowly absorbed into the English language.

2. Adding New Words to a Language

"Languages change at all levels, but lexical change seems to occur most freely and frequently, so much so that we all learn and use the processes whereby new words may be formed". (Bolton and Crystal 1987: 167)

As Bolton and Crystal rightly assert, over time new words are created and added to a language through many different processes but I would like to highlight only two, which relate to the incorporation of the nautical slang in the language. Two of them do not imply the creation of new words, instead, words that already exist undergo a change in category or meaning, and the third process involves the absorption of the slang into other languages.

David Crystal explains the general changes of words in category and meaning:

It is also possible to make new words by changing the function of old words in a sentence: for example, a noun is used as a verb, or vice versa. The process is called *conversion* or *functional shift*, and it has been an important process in the history of English (less so in languages which make use of many inflectional endings). Verbs have become nouns in such cases as *a swim*, *a cheat*, and *a bore*. Nouns have become verbs in *to bottle* and *to referee*, and adjectives in *reproductive furniture* and *brick wall*. Adjectives have become nouns in *a regular* and *a monthly*, and verbs in *to dirty* and *to empty*. [...] It is also possible to make new words by changing the function of old words in a sentence: for example, a noun is used as a verb, or vice versa.⁵⁰

49 James Murray, (2003), *apud*. Sterkenburg, P. van, ed., vol.VI, p.47.

This change in meaning is the process that the nautical expressions which from the focus of this study have undergone. These expressions as a whole do not make sense anymore, as the current speakers live in a different society from the society of two and a half centuries ago, and the nautical influence has mainly disappeared. For instance, 'no room to swing a cat' keeps the sense of a lack of space but has lost the sense of flogging because the meaning of 'cat' as a whip has vanished from the language. Another example is 'a square meal', as speakers give 'square' a figurative meaning, in the sense of a balanced meal, and nobody thinks of the shape of a dish, like seamen did in the past.

The third process that I want to mention is the adoption and subsequent adaptation of words from a foreign language. There is a particular example of this process in the case of nautical slang that proves the large expansion of this jargon, which achieved, not only to stay in the English language, but also to be adapted to others through seamen: "Words like (industrial) strike and nautical terms as *heave* and *splice* (ropes) were imported into Danish in the 19th century by sailors through personal contacts with British seamen and were immediately respelled". (Furiassi, C. *et al.*, 2012: 175)

As I have said, these are just some of the many ways that new words are added to a language, but these two are the most relevant to this study.

3. The Way a Person Speaks

In theory, we can say or write anything we like. In practice, we follow a large number of social rules (most of them unconsciously) that constrain the way we speak and write. There are norms of formality and politeness which we have intuitively assimilated, and which we follow when talking to people who are older, of the opposite sex, and so on. Signing behaviour is constrained in similar ways. *Pragmatics* is the branch of linguistics which studies the factors that govern our choice of language in social interaction and the effect of our choice on others. Pragmatic factors always influence our selection of sounds, grammatical constructions, and vocabulary from the resources of the language.⁵¹

David Crystal talks about all kinds of rules that people follow to speak, including formality and politeness, that are taught to children when

50 Crystal, D., *op. cit.*, p.227.

51 Crystal, D., *op. cit.*, p.275.

they are little and which they learn without questioning, so that when they grow up they keep following these rules unconsciously. These pragmatic factors also affect people choices' when using a word or another depending on the context, on the trend, or the social prestige.

But, with the improvements in international communications, there has come a tendency for such vocabulary items to become common property; speakers will know both forms, even if they use only one themselves; and in some cases the local form will ultimately be displaced by a more distant one which is conquering the whole speech-area. American influence, as could be expected, is particularly powerful, and the English language all over the world now has an enormous number of words and phrases of American origin, many of which are no longer thought of as specifically American at all.⁵²

Many of these choices that speakers make are influenced by the social and the global changes that constantly take place. Sometimes when two languages coexist in a country or region, one of them has more social prestige than the other; this phenomenon is called *diglossia* and is well explained by Crystal: "Perhaps the clearest use of varieties as markers of social structure is in the case of *diglossia* — a language situation in which two markedly divergent varieties, each with its own set of social functions, coexist as standards throughout a community. One of these varieties is used (in many localized variant forms) in ordinary conversations; the other variety is used for special purposes, primarily in formal speech and writing. It has become conventional in linguistics to refer to the former variety as *low* (L), and the latter as *high* (H)" (Crystal, 2007: 312)

This phenomenon may also apply to dialects that coexist in close regions, for instance between Cockney and London's dialect, in a specific context a person who spoke both dialects could choose to use a word from London's because it would be more accepted socially.

In the particular case of this study, the expressions of the nautical jargon still in use may also suffer from 'diglossia' nowadays, since they are generally used in a colloquial register and people would not choose them in a more formal context, instead they would use a formal phrasal verb.

However, leaving my hypothesis aside, it is obvious that people's trade and social status directly influence the way they speak, as in the case of seamen in the past and current society too. "The

52 Bolton, W.F., Crystal, D., eds., (1987), *The Penguins History of Literature: The English Language*, Penguin Books, London, vol.X, p.291.

kind of activity in which we engage will also directly influence the way we communicate. At one level, our activities reflect the social status we have and the roles we perform. But status and role are very general notions, within which it is possible to recognize a much more specific notion of *activity type*". (Crystal, 2007: 327)

4. Changes in Languages

Finally, in this last but perhaps most significant item, I want to prove by theory that language changes along with its vocabulary in order to offer the most likely explanation of how the nineteenth-century nautical jargon made it to our days.

4.1 Changes in Vocabulary

The first important assertion to make is that language is continually changing: "However language began, one thing is certain —it immediately began to change, and has been changing ever since. Languages are always in a state of flux. Change affects the way people speak as inevitably as it does any other area of human life. Language purists do not welcome it, but they can do little about it. Language would stand still only if society did. [...] The only languages that do not change are dead ones". (Crystal, 2007: 357)

Crystal proceeds to analyse the process of change which he defines as "lexical diffusion". It works like this: "At first just a few people use the change sporadically in a few words (commonly occurring words are influenced very quickly); then a large number of words are affected, with the sound gradually being used more consistently; then the majority of the words take up the change". (Crystal, 2007: 359) This logical explanation can also be applied to the case of this study; in the beginning just a few people (probably seamen's relatives and friends) used the new jargon words, but little by little more people were influenced by them and included them in their everyday vocabulary. At the same time, the pronunciation of these words suffered slight changes as they began to spread. Crystal uses the visual and beautiful metaphor of a 'wave' for this gradual change because "...a change spreads through a language in much the same way as a stone sends ripples across a pool". (Crystal, 2007: 359)

There should be a reason for these changes to take place but for now researchers have not found it.

«It is just as difficult to be precise about the origins of a change in language. Who first used the new form? Where was it used? And when, exactly? Historical dictionaries always give an approximate date of entry of a new word of meaning — but these dates invariably reflect the earliest known use of that word in the *written* language. The first use of the word in speech is always an unknown number of years previously. [...] Some scholars have adopted a highly pessimistic view, feeling that the causes can never be found».⁵³

However, “these days, the speculation and pessimism are being replaced by an increasing amount of scientific research, which has shown that there is no single reason for language change. Several factors turn out to be implicated, some to do with the nature of society, and some to do with the nature of language structure”. (Crystal, 2007: 360)

So, there is not one particular reason for vocabulary change but there are social factors responsible for it. From the ones mentioned in Crystal’s essay, I want to point out the most relevant ones for this study: cultural developments and social prestige. The linguist says, culture makes “objects and ideas fall out of daily use, and the language becomes obsolete”; and regarding social prestige: “Subconscious change, where people are not aware of the direction in which their speech is moving, is less noticeable, but far more common. The movement may be towards a favoured accent or dialect (one which has *positive prestige*), or away from one which is held in low esteem (*negative prestige*)”. (Crystal, 2007: 361-362) The first factor is an example of what can happen to vocabulary but has not happened to slang; though the second social factor of subconscious change could have possibly occurred, due to the *wave effect* mentioned.

I want to add to the list of social factors the influence of a collective of society in a language. In this case, it would be seamen. My hypothesis, which was presented in Section B, is that, as the Royal Navy was so large and important two centuries ago, the crew, mainly with humble origins, spread their jargon when they were on land with their families and friends, and it gradually influenced more and more people’s vocabulary until it was incorporated, with the required changes in meaning, into language.

4.2 Death of Languages

53 Crystal, D., *op. cit.*, p.360.

It is obvious that many languages, dialects, expressions, terms, etc. cannot survive certain periods or changes: “Parents use the old language less and less to their children, or in front of their children; and when more children come to be born within the new society, adults find fewer opportunities to use that language to them. Those families which do continue to use the language find there are fewer other families to talk to, and their own usage becomes inward-looking and idiosyncratic, resulting in *family dialects*”. (Crystal, 2007: 338) The main reason for losing vocabulary is disuse. And when it becomes obsolete and old-fashioned it is very difficult to reincorporate it to speech. Nevertheless, there is always a chance for old words to persist through the written language.

In this section, I have given a justified overview of the processes of a language from general to specific, and I have supported my hypothesis with David Crystal’s linguistic research, although I let it opened to further research. This linguistic theory helps understanding the previous analyses which revealed the validity of the idioms and provides a possible explanation for it.

CONCLUSIONS

After concluding this study, the first general assertion that I can make is that some expressions of eighteenth-century nautical jargon are still alive in everyday written English. The factors and explanations that led me to this statement are the ones that I am going to explain in detail hereupon.

For this study I proposed fifteen expressions with a nautical origin, some of which have kept the same meaning that they had when they originated and others that have altered in meaning, due to changes in society and customs over two centuries and a half. In any case they are still being used in the 21st century and, in accordance with the analyses that I carried out, they are mainly used in headlines of articles, and in songs. Most of these idioms are used both in American and in British English, but there are some which are preferentially used in one of these English varieties.

A significant aspect that I discovered is the change of register from the one stated in dictionaries, which is generally informal. The examples in use provided in the analyses show that most idioms are used in a wider range of registers, which cover informal, standard and formal register, and even specialised contexts.

Based on linguistic theory, I found some possible explanations for nautical language to still be in force in written English. Firstly, most of the analysed expressions have lost their original sense and their reference to nautical elements and have adapted their meaning to the needs and customs of a different society. Secondly, the choices made by speakers when deciding which words to use depending on the social prestige or on the trend have also been a decisive factor for maintaining these jargon terms.

Another influential aspect has been trade and its consequent spread of the language. Possibly, the main process that has brought these idioms to our time has been 'lexical diffusion', which would correspond to the incorporation and spread of new words from seamen to their relatives on land and from them to other people, and so on until they were included in everyday language.

Despite all these reasons and processes of change in language, there are always terms that cannot survive certain periods and fall into disuse, as I have confirmed with the expression 'to keelhaul' and which could also happen to two other expressions ('know the ropes' and 'three sheets to the wind') if their usage continues to be restricted to some specific areas.

All in all, I have obtained revealing and interesting information of a specific field of the English language, which is the nautical influence. This field lacks research and I hope I have, at least, opened a research thread for it, although my research has not been as exhaustive as I would have liked, due to the limited resources that I had available and to the kind of study this is. That is why I suggest further research on the subject, specifically on the nautical influence in everyday spoken English.

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