

## *Pragmatically conditioned conceptualization of space. A-prefixed nautical terms in Early Modern English*<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the semantic peculiarities of a restricted set of Early Modern English semi-grammatical words indicating space and used in the nautical register. The set of terms analyzed constitutes the specialized 10% of a wider Oxford English Dictionary sample which includes ca. 400 *a*-prefixed terms of an adjectival/adverbial nature. Once the selected words have been assigned a structurally and semantically adequate category, the pragmatically controlled specialization process undergone by many of these items is explained. Among the issues to be considered are the degree to which the selected terms match the prototypical meaning assigned to the category as a whole; the focalising of [GOAL] as opposed to [DIRECTIONALITY]; the dimensional properties punctually conceived for the location concerned, and the wider semantic and structural consequences of this pragmatically-induced conceptualization.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the semantic peculiarities of a restricted set of Early Modern English (EME) semi-grammatical words indicating space and used in the nautical register. The set of terms analyzed constitutes the specialized 10% of a wider *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) sample which includes ca. 400 *a*-prefixed words of an adjectival/ adverbial nature. The paper is structured into four parts: in the introduction (1) I will delimit the scope of the study and sketch the category where these nautical terms may fall. For the sake of clarity and at the risk of being unusually lengthy, some words will be devoted to the modelling of this general category

in EME and to the central meaning which has been so far assigned to it. The particular purpose of this study will be stated in 2, where a more elaborate description of the corpus will also be offered: problems of identification of terms, formal features, life-span and developmental behaviour of the words selected will be dealt with, as well as the observed relationship holding between the general and the specialized register. The main section of this paper (3) corresponds to the semantic analysis of the set of nautical terms. A central meaning will be suggested, in order to describe the way in which maritime words fit the general system defined elsewhere and summarized in section 1. Finally some general, yet provisional, conclusions will be drawn in 4.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL FRAMEWORK

### 1.1. Scope of the study

I will begin by explicitly restricting the scope of the present study. It is not my intention to analyze EME nautical terms in general, but only a small and very specific subset of them: those *a*-prefixed elements of an adjectival or adverbial nature which the OED labels *Naut.*, although this characterization is not without problems, as will be seen later on. The selection of these particular terms responds to a wider research project I have been carrying out for the last two years (Tejada 1998, Tejada 2000, Tejada in press). Though still unfinished it should eventually lead to the structural and semantic definition of a complex, apparently unstable and “centrifugal” category, which made itself relevant mainly in EME only to disappear later on, washed away into different structures or systems as history developed. From our 20th c. vantage point, the category should be thought of as marginal to the general course of English linguistic history; it may be said to constitute an aspectual system which eventually failed<sup>2</sup>.

Two basic assumptions underlie the whole study. Firstly, that new intermediate stages of language development can be defined through dynamic re-interpretations of linguistic change. These stages, though secondary to what Aarsleff (1983) would call the linguistic «history of success», keep perfectly stable and complex until they are superseded by others. The subsequent re-organisation of the elements involved derives from the greater attraction exerted on them by linguistic factors different from the ones prevailing at an earlier stage. Secondly, that a category can only be described through dynamic and gradual principles. As studies in prototypicality have shown (cf. Taylor 1989), this means that not all elements are equal members of the category described; their links to it may be weaker or stronger, few or many. Centrality in the system remains, therefore, a matter of more or less.

## 1.2. The category of *a*-prefixed structures in EME. General characterization

As defined in Tejada 2000 the basic elements for the formal definition of the category where the selected terms may fall is the *a*- morpheme, *prefixed* to derived words which appear in *postverbal* position. In EME this particular structure seems to act as a syntactic and semantic focus —we would rather call it *attractor*— of an aspectual nature. Consequently, it carries about temporary and partial reorganizations of the lexical, semantic and syntactic systems of the period under analysis. More specifically, the structure considered constitutes a semi-grammatical marker of the aspectual character of a situation. This aspectual character is not inherent in the predicate, but is realized through an operator, a constituent with which it combines, i.e. the *a*-prefixed word. This means that the aspectual characterization of the predicate is realized in a discontinuous way<sup>3</sup>.

## 1.3. Modelling of the category

The actual modelling of the category we are concerned with here is achieved in English after a slow process that exhibits a special acceleration and its maximal coherence in the modern period, particularly between the 16th and the 18th centuries. As expected, the restructuring process combines inheritance with motivated innovation at several developmental stages which may be worth pointing out:

- (a) Even before its wider generalization in EME, the morpheme *a*-constituted a neutralizer of previously distinct categories:
  - (i) clearly reflecting the natural grammaticalizing development from lexis to derivation and from local to abstract meanings, the *a*-morpheme stood out as the evolutionary outcome of previous local expressions, becoming increasingly fuzzier: e.g. *in a rank* > *arank*, *on foot* > *afoot*.
  - (ii) on the other hand, from the final stages of Old English the *a*-morpheme constituted an undefined element of aspectual notions previously signalled by different affixes: Old English *be*-, *of*-, *and*- and others converge in later *a*-. Our *a*-prefix, thus, exhibits the prescriptive formal reduction observed in morphemes of a generalized meaning, as required by grammaticalizing strategies (cf. Hopper and Traugott 1993).

- (b) Added to this inherited material, an energetic innovative dynamism is perceived in EME: lexical creation, consistent formal and semantic adaptation of foreign words or phrases, semantic changes of already existing terms, unetymological reiconization of structures aimed at more transparent and coherent meanings are just some of the phenomena observed in the rising of the morpheme and the postverbal position of the derived word to categorial status (Tejada 1998).

Nevertheless, it should be made clear that from our standpoint it does not matter so much when the *a*-prefixed words were actually formed, but only the fact that they exist at a particular moment of history and that they contribute to a newly structured system, in which they develop new organizing principles and act as attracting forces for new members to join in. Given the fact that this global reorganization seems to be achieved with high degrees of internal consistency, our task so far has been to find some order out of apparent chaos.

#### 1.4. Core meaning

Once our particular marker has been recognised as a potential indicator of aspectual notions, a core and most general meaning should be assigned to it. In Tejada 2000 we suggested that of [STATE], i.e. temporary, non-permanent, accidental location, either physical or metaphorical. Very broadly speaking the marker under analysis seems to integrate situations both denoting movement and temporary location in a particular state as different perspectives of the same external reality (cf. Talmy 1985)<sup>4</sup>. However, this notion of [STATE] underlies what otherwise represents very diverse situations, given the idiosyncratic nature of the elements combined in each particular structure (predicates + derived words, cf. footnote 3).

The existence of this central meaning for our sample of general data was claimed on the following evidential bases:

- (a) Different processes of accidentalization of adjectives may be observed. As Dahl (1994: 244) defined them, these are processes «by which a property which is inherent of ("essential to") a lexeme is interpreted as an "accidental property"». As it seems, this may be morphologically marked in EME and affects not only prototypical adjectives, denoting essential qualities (cf. Dixon 1977, 1982; Huddleston 1984; Givón 1993), but also nouns derived from them or other particularly stable (basic, natural) ones. All these words suffer the expected formal modification when they denote temporary

situations, i.e. when they move away from their semantic centre. This may be illustrated by adjectives such as *afar*, *aflat*, *alow*, *afresh*, *agreat*, *agood*, *aright*, *awrong*, *awide*, *aleft*, *alength*, *astoop*, *awry*, vs. *flat*, *low*, *fresh*, etc. and nouns such as *aheat*, *aheight* or *aground*.

- (b) Closely related to this phenomenon, semantic changes such as the one undergone by *adry* seem to be noteworthy. From a general stative, non-essential meaning «dry», it moves to the more figurative, essentially contingent and undoubtedly accidental one of «thirsty».
- (c) Structural changes also contribute to the same idea. Let us only mention the recategorization of adjectives such as *alight* and *afraid*, which in our period become structurally restricted to predicative uses, i.e. to postverbal position which together with the *a*-prefix constitutes the marking itself.
- (d) Perhaps most important of all, the focussing on [STATE] implies that notions such as [DYNAMICITY], [DURATION], [CAUSE] and [PROCESS] are backgrounded, and this may also be evidenced by the analysis of the data.

The evidence also suggests that the semantic component [GOAL] is essential to the characterization of the aspectual system proposed. Because of the very nature of the category involved, however, this component of [GOAL] emerges lexically combined with others which tend to distort our perception of the whole. (Tejada 2000). In any case, if this idea of [GOAL] proves to be most relevant in perspectivizing the situation, we must conclude that atelic, temporal and dynamic nuances are actually backgrounded.

Our argument is further reinforced by significant developmental observations affecting the words analyzed. If we look closely into the evolution followed by *a*-prefixed terms in EME, we notice that participial (and therefore verbal, processual) forms such as *ahungered* or *afeared* disappear in favour of adjectival ones (i.e. *ahungry*, *afear*)<sup>5</sup>.

The neutralizing of the notion of [CAUSE], in turn, may be illustrated by the development of the word *adrought*. In it the notions of two different verbs, the causative *adry3an* («make dry»), and the more neutral *adru3ian* («become dry»), formally converge. This formal evolution reveals a parallel semantic shift, largely consistent with the system we are describing here. That is, we seem forced to disregard the difference between

- (i) *A makes/ brings/ holds/ puts B a-x*, and
- (ii) *B is a-x*<sup>6</sup>.

Or to put it in other words, causative meanings become clearly backgrounded.

Last but not least in this brief listing of arguments, we should mention some semantic changes which contribute to confirm our basic claim regarding the core meaning assignable to the marker under investigation. The semantic development of words such as *adown* or *adrigh* enlarge on the idea that the focus of attention is the end point, the movement towards or the location at, a final endpoint. Notice that *adown* developed the meaning «to an end» from a more literal one, and *adrigh* originally «at a distance» generated a new more radical sense of «disappearance».

### 1.5. Conclusions so far

In short, from the analysis of the general corpus where *a*-prefixed nautical terms belong we might conclude so far that:

- (a) During the EME period the morpheme *a*- reveals itself as particularly active. Lexical creations, recreations, adaptations and selective survival of terms may be observed.
- (b) We are led to believe that the *a*-prefix constituted an identifiable formative, perceived as functional by EME speakers. The association of form and meaning was becoming more and more transparent.
- (c) The core meaning attached to the prefix, that of [STATE], proves coherent throughout the system.
- (d) Given (b) and (c), we confirm what dynamic models of linguistic change foresee, i.e. that coherence increase constitutes an agent of change itself, and that an increase in frequency involves salience (Warner 1990).

## 2. THE PRESENT STUDY

### 2.1. Our hypotheses

The idea of devoting special attention to nautical words derived from the analysis of the general corpus. From the very early stages in the investigation it became evident that the terms signalled as «maritime» or «nautical» in the OED were sufficient in number as to be taken into account and given a special treatment. Our purpose this time has been, therefore, to study the peculiarities of the subcorpus in order to test our hypotheses that: (i) the behaviour of these terms is common to that found in the general corpus, both formally and semantically; (ii) specific reasons characterizing a coherent and homogeneous behaviour of this restricted subset of terms may be found; (iii) in the event

that a similar behaviour between nautical and other *a*-prefixed terms were observed, the nautical subcorpus should serve as intensive feedback to the general system proposed; (iv) the linguistic behaviour of nautical terms may make us modify our hypotheses on the general category as previously forwarded or elaborate more delicate descriptions of it.

## 2.2. Description of the maritime (sub)corpus

The words analyzed and compiled in Appendix I represent approximately 10% of the whole corpus of *a*-prefixed elements. We must point out, however, some problems in the identification of elements. Initially the electronic version of the OED (second edition) was used, which rendered two different types of elements:

- (a) Those labelled *Naut.* at the head of the lexical entrance;
- (b) Those exhibiting just one special meaning, thus labelled *Naut.*

The very nature of the investigation, however, demanded the inclusion of other terms (signalled \* in Appendix I) unlabelled in the OED, but whose meaning was essentially or exclusively described through maritime quotation-texts; and the consideration of some others understandably unlabelled, but whose frequency in nautical texts would necessarily be higher than in other kinds of contexts: *anorth*, *ahead*, etc. (These words proved not to distort our results qualitatively and were not explicitly selected in the end).

A brief descriptive outline of the corpus would yield that: a) from the morphological point of view, the words selected can be said to mostly reflect the pattern: *a*-prefix + noun or adverb, and much less frequently: *a*-prefix + adjective or verb; b) structurally the corpus is significantly defined by the presence of antonyms and semantic polarizations; and c) chronologically, it clearly centres around the modern period of English, although here further specification seems compulsory.

Of the terms analyzed, the ones labelled in the OED as *Naut.* all enter the language between the end of the 16th c. through to the 18th c. Most of them survive until the 19th c. Those belonging to the general register but exhibiting a specialized “nautical” meaning enter the language at different stages: there are some Old English derived terms that acquired their weakened form already in the 12th c.; some others appear in EME, although these are not many. It is interesting to note that for some of the terms the OED recognises a gap of historical documentation between the 12th and the 17th centuries, which would make us think about some kind of significant renaissance. As for the survival or permanence of these terms in the language, some 70% have

disappeared from the general register; some survive semantically shifted in extremely restricted contexts, as almost fossilized phrases (cf. *aback*); and ca. 10% remain in nautical linguistic settings. The exception confirming the rule is given by *about*, *across*, *after* and *asleep*.

With regard to the different paths through which nautical terms have been introduced into the language, all three procedures common to the general corpus are also observed. Very briefly, to the natural inheritance —at times difficult to trace, as previously stated— (e.g. *about*, *across*, *aft*<sup>7</sup>, *aftermost*, *alow*, *asleep*, etc.) and the specific lexical innovation observable in the EME period (e.g. *aloof*, *apeak*, *astarboard*, *astays*, *astern*, etc.), we must add analogical creations or readjustments of foreign words carried out to fit the formal and semantic pattern of the so-called *a*-prefix. That is the case of *avast* or *ahoy*.

As for the developmental behaviour of the terms in the corpus, we will just say that they tend to move from the general register of language to the specialized one, usually maintaining two separate trajectories from then on. However, as there are examples of terms taking the opposite direction, more refined analyses are required.

As we have already mentioned, some 50% of the words analyzed are drawn from the everyday register where they held meanings of temporary [STATE] or even [LOCATION], exhibiting just the first degree of abstraction; that is, the general meaning assigned to these forms as aspectual markers. In nautical contexts, this general meaning undergoes a process of specialized restriction, whereas the word used in its more general sense follows a path of increasing subjectification, i.e. it begins to shift towards more subjective nuances. This pattern of evolution features older terms. The word *anend*, for instance, acquires the meaning «constantly» only in the general register, whereas it develops into «vertically», when applied to the masts. *Athwart*, in turn, initially meaning «from side to side» becomes «wrongly» in functionally neutral variants.

For the other subgroup of the corpus the evolution is different. They may emerge in EME as nautical terms and remain in the language with this meaning, either literally or metaphorically, as will be illustrated below. Others, although emerging in this specialized register, develop a figurative meaning in later stages of the language which will, in turn, pass on to more general contexts. That is the case of *abaft* which generalized with the meaning «behind» at the end of the 18th c., or *aloof*, eventually meaning «distant», both physically and psychologically from an original «windward». Last in this relation, we must mention the word *asleep* which maintains its original, more or less conventional, meaning for general uses throughout the period and only in the 19th c. generates a figurative, metaphorical sense to refer to the sails «filled with wind». The different patterns of evolution are better illustrated in Figure 1.



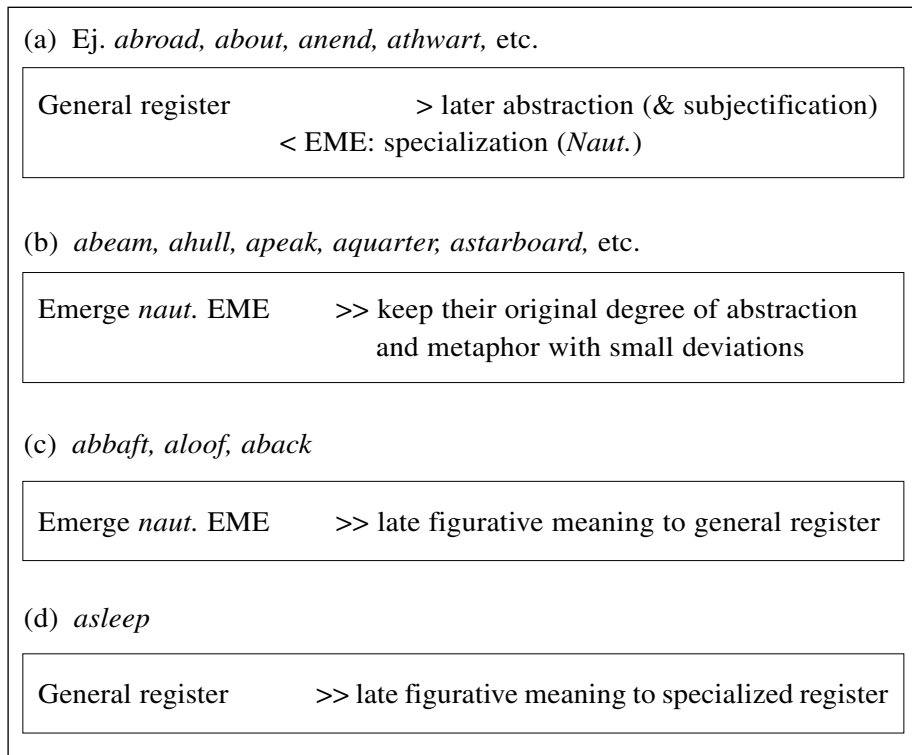


Fig. 1. Main paths of evolution of *a*-prefixed nautical terms.

Equally interesting in the description of our corpus is to observe the kind of texts in which the terms appear. Curiously enough, it is in newspapers, travel books or other sorts of geographical literature that these words are mostly used, rather than in technical or highly specialized works. This implies that the nautical register in EME was neither deeply restricted nor did it belong to a socioculturally highly controlled group. Although undoubtedly a situational dialect, it does not appear to be so technically confined, or autonomous. The borderline between the specialized and the general register becomes blurred. There are different kinds of evidence supporting this assertion. Even the short quotations given in the OED offer us proof of this filtering between the two areas. Comments of a quasi-formulaic nature (cf. «in sea phrase», «as they —i.e. seamen— call it») in texts pertaining to the general register confirm the generalizing process of nautical terms. But moving out of our corpus we learn in the bibliography that the maritime variety

was actively open and innovative, exerting a strong influence on the general course of linguistic expansion. That is the reason why it was explicitly rejected as a model in the elaboration of the standard. As Bailey (1992) puts it: «Because it was thought to be flawed, maritime English was shunned in the search for an ideal; in Puttenham's view, coastal towns (including London) could not provide models for cultivated English at the end of the 16th c., since there "straungers haunt for trafikke sake" and seafarers introduce *unwanted innovations*» (my emphasis). Despite this normative caution, its expanding influence is confirmed by the fact that non-technical dictionaries of the 17th c. contained increasing numbers of nautical terms, often grudgingly, but nonetheless recognising them as significant additions to the general vocabulary (Osselton 1958: 170-2).

**2.3.** This very cursory description of the corpus has rendered at least two interesting conclusions up to now. First, a clear increase of vocabulary through *a*-prefixed terms is observed in the nautical register. Both the period and the lexical field proved to be significantly active along lines similar to the ones described for the general corpus. This contributes to the configuration of the general category, as expected. And secondly, a fruitful interrelationship between the general and the specialized register seems to unveil, to which we will come back later on.

### 3. SEMANTIC ANALYSIS AND COGNITIVE REPRESENTATION OF SPACE

So far we have dealt with features and peculiarities of the corpus which, despite the necessarily specific details, did not make this group any more singular than the other of non-specialized terms. Quite on the contrary, the behaviour of this rather homogeneous subset of words confirmed more general patterns. Actually what confers it its real singularity is the tight semantic coherence that the restricted group exhibits. And that will be our next concern.

#### 3.1. Differences from the general corpus

Through a close semantic approach to the corpus we observe that nautical terms share a clear sense of [STATE] or temporary [LOCATION] with the other members of the category, be it either quasi- literal —with stative or scarcely dynamic verbs—, or through the notion of [GOAL]. However, they differ from the general corpus in the following:

- (a) The degree of literal interpretation of the core meaning. [STATE] and [GOAL] usually refer to physical locations.
- (b) The high degree of objectivity observed. The field itself seems to constrain the semantic evolution of the terms towards more abstract and subjective meanings. They move apparently within a narrower scope. We no longer witness such dramatic semantic shifts as those undergone by words as *abed* (from the purest local sense > «sick, ill»), *afoot* («on foot» > «active»), *asquint* («to one side» > «averted, furtive glance») or *awake* («not asleep» > «watchful»).
- (c) Prototypically the meaning focusses on [GOAL] without further interference. If more dynamic verbs are involved in the situation, it is this [GOAL] as end-point which constitutes the semantic centre, not the idea of [TRAJECTORY], or [PROCESS], or [DYNAMICITY], or even that of [RESULT] of any activity. It is rather the precise point or location arrived at or intended to what calls for attention, as will be shown below. For our purposes, it is this clear-cut meaning which singles out these terms as specialized, as opposed to the more neutral, semantically diffused ones of the general corpus.
- (d) As we move farther away from the prototypical semantic core of this register, there lies a reduced number of terms (*aweigh*, *atrip*, *asleep*, *ahull*, *astays*, *atry*) embracing the more general sense of temporary [STATE]. In some of them further metonymic or metaphoric shifts may be observed (cf. *aweigh*, *astays*, *atrip*, for the metonymic displacements and *asleep*, *ahull* or *atry* for the metaphoric ones, though the difference between the two groups is often one of degree). However, we must notice that except for *ahull* and *astays* all these words derive from bases which do not strictly belong to the specialized register: *weigh*, *trip*, etc. vs for example *stern*, *beam*, *lee*, etc.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.2. Conditioning factors

Underlying the meaning of the various specialized terms as proposed, there are factors to be accounted for:

In this respect, the very nature of the discourse in which these terms appear should be highlighted in the first place. One of the peculiarities of nautical language is that it is pragmatically *marked*, (skilled) action-driven. This feature seems to condition both the inner structure of the terms and the paths along which the semantic processes of words flow. The pragmatically marked character of our genre implies that, as in other similarly constrained variants, the code itself becomes severely limited to a small set of physical, concrete objects or entities; in our case, parts and components of the ship, propelling

agents, such as the wind, or conventional magnitudes (45° or 90°). Being pragmatically marked or action-driven also means that the language is mainly used to achieve extremely precise objectives. Therefore the specific manouvres needed to fulfill the goals planned —frequently changes in the location of the vessel or of its components (sails, yards, masts)— must be described with refined precision. Both these arguments may explain why physical objects are often taken as the morphological basis of derivation (e.g. *abeam*, *ahull*, *astarboard*, *astays*, *astern*, *acockbill*).

On the other hand, in an action-guided type of text the most important discourse strategy may be that of avoiding obscurity or ambiguity. One is compelled to be brief and relevant to smooth the precise and effective understanding of the message. This non-redundant, economic verbal exchange demanded by efficient communication accounts for the semantic polarizations and exactness of meaning previously mentioned and, more importantly, deeply affects the conceptualization of spatial properties.

### 3.3. More specific cognitive processes

As we will try to illustrate, the need to achieve a high degree of efficiency requires that space be conventionally reduced to some maximal fixed points, i.e. to dimensionally neutral, stylized goals. More specifically, the abstraction observed in most nautical *a-* prefixed words consists in:

- (a) The conceptualization of *objects and physical entities* as *spatial points*, usually maximal, end-points, and only occasionally as points of reference. This conventional perspectivizing of space helps to structure the system through the already mentioned polarizations: in *astarboard* - *aport* as in *astern* - *afore*, the terms *starboard*, *port* or *stern* no longer denote physical parts of the ship, but farthest points of an extension. Even the incidence of wind on the sides of the ship is conceived as a fixed point, which requires a higher degree of abstraction than previous examples, cf. *aweather*, *aloof*, *alee*.
- (b) The focalizing and *formal conventionalization of the endpoints* of trajectories or otherwise undefined magnitudes, through semantic specialization of the terms involved. The word *about*, that usually meant «in partial rotation», becomes a «180° turn» in the nautical register. The relevant focus is clearly now the final position to be achieved, i.e. not to be surpassed. And this is in close connection with *aquarter*, which defines a precise «45° location abaft the beam». The word *abroad*, in turn, shifts from a general meaning of «over a broad or wide surface» to the specialized «widely apart», «maximal spread

- of sails» and *across* comes to define a final cross-like figure of yards. In *abreast* (meaning «in parallel» «(advancing) to a level with») the final maximal point not to be exceeded might be implicit in the imaginary limiting line emerging from the figure of female breasts.
- (c) The *culturally conventionalized interpretation of certain positions as final points*. In EME the word *apeak* meant «vertically» and functioned as a synonym of *anend*, a derived word from *end* meaning «in an upright position», but explicitly referring to the final limit. The interpretation of *apeak* as the vertical point to be reached could be due to cultural and pragmatic conventions, as well as to natural ones. An even more distinct example may be that of *acockbill*, meaning «with the bills of the anchor upwards». Again, through metaphoric extension the —culturally familiar— defiant position of the cock receives a reduced, precise interpretation: the exact point to be reached by the anchor to perform a particular activity. Even the presence of the word *anorth*, with no parallel *asouth*, may be interpreted along similar lines. *Anorth* constitutes the prototypical point of orientation in our hemisphere and has thus been selected to integrate the aspectual category, i.e. has been partially grammaticalized through a process of routinization due to its cultural and pragmatic salience.

In all these examples even more clearly than in the normal register of language, trajectories are neutralized. As in previous analyses we find good bases for the argument. Words such as *aftward*, *afterward*, *aleeward* or *sternwards*, where the suffix serves the function of focalizing precisely the notion of [DIRECTIONALITY], would probably not have arisen if there were others to perform their same functions. In a pragmatically-conditioned type of language, where ambiguity is to be avoided, these words find their proper place as distributional opposites of *aft*, *astern*, *alee*.

Similarly a commentary on the word *after* may be of some use to confirm our hypothesis. This word, itself a comparative, would not exist if the rear part of the ship were not conceptualized as an endpoint one could approach. It is noteworthy that up to the EME period expressions such as *come nigh* and *come near* had different meanings, the former probably focussing on the notion [GOAL] and the latter on those of [TRAJECTORY] and [DYNAMICITY]. We would propose the same difference for *aft* and *after* in our corpus. It is only from this period onwards that the two forms begin to merge at least in the general register of the language (Strang 1970) for reasons we will not mention here, but systemically consistent with the general course of English. The loss of emphasis that the merge caused on comparatives and the general defocussing of [GOAL] as opposed to [TRAJECTORY] may explain the emergence of words

such as *aftermost* in the 18th c. That would then represent the point closest to the stern, that final point to be reached previously denoted by *aft*.

Moreover, as happened in the general corpus, towards the end of the period there emerge unstable prepositional structures alternative to the prefixed forms, which confirm the local, stative, non-directional interpretation of the terms analyzed. *Abreast* alternates with *on/in a breast*; *aloft* with *on loft*, etc. As pointed out elsewhere (Tejada 1998, 2000) these expanded unetymological structures represent prepositional reiconizations intended to make meaning even more transparent.

Before we move on to less central aspects of our corpus it would be interesting to devote a word to the character of the adverbs that often modify our prefixed expressions. I am referring to such words as *nearly*, *all*, *exactly* or *flat* (as in *all aback*, for instance). Far from weakening our localist [GOAL AS ENDPPOINT] hypothesis, these adverbs should be interpreted to confirm it, if we take them to be aspectual adverbs and not adverbs of degree, in the sense Bosque (1990: 193) defines them. As aspectual adverbs, in fact, they imply the presence of a final point, though this requires further investigation.

### 3.4. The notion of [INTENSITY]

The clear-cut conceptualization of [GOAL] as endpoint and the collateral image of [MAXIMAL LIMIT, EXTREME] it may arouse contributes to strengthen the notion of [INTENSITY]. It should be noted that this notion, however marginal to us, proved relevant both formal- and semantically to the general corpus in which our small subset of terms fit (Tejada 1998). If one believes that the behaviour of terms in the nautical subcorpus reinforces the organizing principles of the whole category, as we do, it seems necessary to note to what extent it truly helps to settle this secondary notion of [INTENSITY]. In this respect, it should be mentioned that the idea of [INTENSITY] is awakened not only by this subtle image of [EXTREME] suggested by endpoints, but also by the presence of semantically more transparent words, by the occurrence of relevant, however sporadic, semantic shifts, and by the substitution of some older terms by *a*-prefixed words. Among our examples, *anend* stands out as one of those semantically more transparent words expressing [INTENSITY], if we disregard the fact that the word *aft* was originally a superlative. Particularly interesting seems the path followed by *ataunt*. In this case, the word undergoes an analogical process of formal reinterpretation, according to which the original French expression *autant* comes visually and acoustically closer to an affixed form *a-taunt*, at times even written separately. This process could well be semantically motivated through the notion of intensity implied by the word: “to the full”, later specialized into “with all the masts standing and fully

rigged”. Equally noteworthy may be to realize that the word *afloat*, initially denoting a state (“at sea”), develops an intensive meaning of “in full activity”; or that *athwart* (“transversely, from one extreme of the ship to the other”) substitutes an older *overthwart*, i.e. an explicitly “intensity-word”. The attraction exerted by the category as a whole with regard to these notions of [INTENSITY] and especially [MAXIMAL ENDPOINT] may account for the analogical extension of the non-prefixed but formally resembling word *acorn*, one of whose most specialized uses denotes a small piece of wood placed in the “uppermost point of the spindle”.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis of *a*-prefixed nautical terms in EME we can draw the following conclusions so far:

- (i) The nautical language is shown to reflect a high degree of productivity and lexical innovation of derived *a*-prefixed words during this period. This clearly contributes to the configuration and coherence increase of the new general system in which these words fit, i.e. the category of aspectual markers broadly defined in 1, and ratifies the idea that the *a*-prefix constituted an identifiable formative in EME, whose functionality was clearly perceived.
- (ii) The doubtful etymology claimed for most nautical terms in our corpus gives credit to the productivity of the marker subject to analysis. The *a*-prefix is confirmed to have exerted a strong formal and semantic attraction, which may explain analogical extensions and other linguistic movements often difficult to trace, as we mentioned above. Although in the larger corpus examples are plentiful, the emergence of *avast* and *ahoy* as specialized nautical terms serve equally well to illustrate this phenomenon of analogical attraction.
- (iii) Nautical *a*-prefixed terms show a homogeneous semantic nature. As expected in a restricted situational variant, the terms adopt a controlled semantic behaviour, allowing lower degrees of abstraction and subjectivity than those found in the general register of language. This behaviour helps to fulfill the precision requirement.
- (iv) [TEMPORARY LOCATION IN A FINAL, EXTREME POINT] may be suggested as the prototypical meaning underlying these terms, to which small, more abstract deviations may be added. The notion of [DIRECTIONALITY] becomes clearly neutralized, as has been proved through morphological, semantic and lexical arguments.

- (v) Considering the relationship holding between specialized and general uses of language in EME, we must conclude a dynamic bi-directional influence between registers. Consequently we are led to think that it was this mutual feedback between the small, well-defined, specialized subsystem and the wider general one, more variable and disperse, which eventually modelled the aspectual system we have been trying to describe.
- (vi) The perspective obtained from the analysis of this reduced corpus of terms, allows us to signal the 17th c. as the stage of maximal stability of the system: a stage when neither the figurative, more subjective meanings of the general register, nor the more specialized maritime ones had evolved yet (see figure 2).
- (vii) Owing to the global development of the language towards time and process-bound structures and meanings, and to the reduction of English maritime activity, nautical *a*-prefixed terms, as those in the general register, increasingly disappeared during the 19th c.

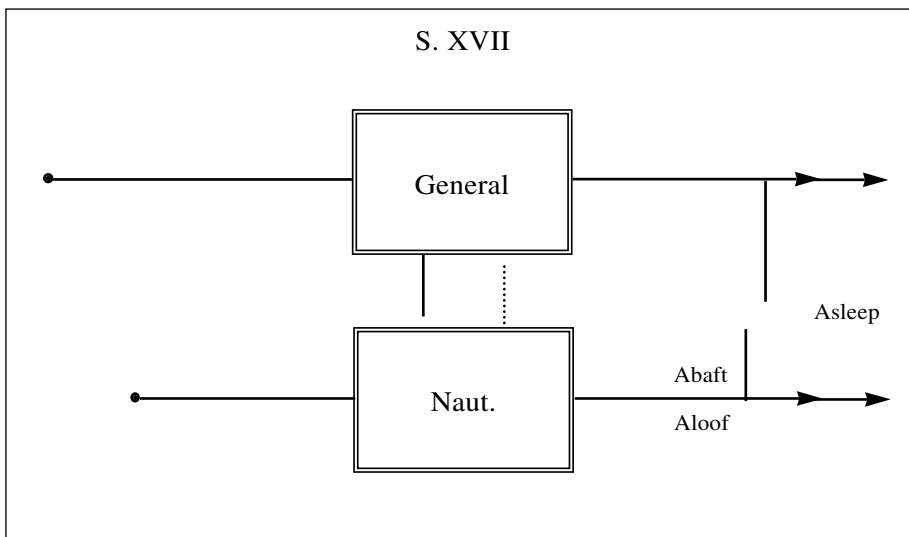


Fig. 2. Relation holding between the specialized and the general registers of language.



NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This article is a slightly modified version of my contribution to the 6th International Colloquium on Cognitive Science, held in Donostia in May 1999. I wish to thank Prof. Bernárdez, Contreras and Marín for their thorough and friendly revision of earlier drafts.

<sup>2</sup> For other failed systems in the linguistic evolution of English, see Smith 1996.

<sup>3</sup> *Semi-grammatical* must be understood in terms of a grammaticalization process not yet completed (cf. Byber and Pagliuca 1985, Bybee and Dahl, 1989, Hopper and Traugott 1993). The *a-* prefixed words must be considered both lexically —since they exhibit a derivative nature and combine lexically with the verb— and as grammatical operators. Actually the fact that the *a-* morpheme exhibits a derivative nature brings about serious consequences for the definition of the category. It structures an open class of words of unbounded dimensions, with their own combinability restrictions and semantic idiosyncrasy, similar to that of vocabulary. As any lexical set, therefore, the words included in this category prove reluctant to systematization under one single notion and, as will be seen, rather abstract analyses are called for. For the idea of «aspectual character of a situation», see Lehman 1994).

<sup>4</sup> The loss of the locative final inflection *-e* (vs directional *-ø*) contributed to this reinterpretation.

<sup>5</sup> We may even say that noun-like forms prevail in the general corpus studied. It is only from the 18th century that deverbal words such as *adoing* begin to proliferate, that is when the notion of process grows stronger in the general verbal system of the English language, and even then, the perspective adopted represents the situation as a [state of activity]. Moreover, it is during this later period that past participles, i.e. dynamic, processual, verbal forms substitute noun-like EME aspectual derivatives: e.g. EME *abackstays* was substituted by 18th c. *backed*, *abroad* by *spread* when referred to sails, and *acockbill* by *cocked*.

<sup>6</sup> Something similar happens in very close Spanish expressions: *estar/poner/dejar a remojo*; *a buen recaudo*; *a punto*; *a parte*; *a prueba*; *a cubierta*; *de parto*; *a la cabeza*; *a medias*, etc. The prepositional structure reflects no change no matter whether [CAUSE] is implied or not.

<sup>7</sup> We include this non-prefixed word (as well as *after*, *aftermost*) in the corpus because it accommodates both formally and semantically to the categorial pattern. Its structural connection with *abaft* should also be taken into account.

<sup>8</sup> *Aweigh* is said of an anchor when it is just raised perpendicularly from the ground (in weighing). It holds a partially synonymic relationship with *atrip* (< “on trip”) when this word is applied to the same object. However, *atrip* can also be said of *sails* obviously, if they are ready for trimming. *Ahull*, in turn, refers to the state of lying “at the mercy of the sea and the waves”. *Atry*, opposite to *ahull*, refers to the ship in a gale “kept by a judicious balance of canvas with her bows to the sea”.

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## APPENDIX I

<i>aback</i>	<i>*alee</i>
<i>abackstays</i>	<i>*aleeward</i>
<i>*abaft</i>	<i>aloft</i>
<i>abeam</i>	<i>alongshore</i>
<i>about</i>	<i>aloof</i>
<i>abox</i>	<i>alow</i>
<i>abreast</i>	<i>an-end</i>
<i>abroad</i>	<i>a-peak</i>
<i>a-cock-bill</i>	<i>aquarter</i>
<i>acorn</i>	<i>*aport</i>
<i>across</i>	<i>asleep</i>
<i>adrift</i>	<i>astarboard</i>
<i>*afloat</i>	<i>astays</i>
<i>afore</i>	<i>astern</i>
<i>afoul</i>	<i>ataunt</i>
<i>aft</i>	<i>athwart</i>
<i>after</i>	<i>atrip</i>
<i>aftermost</i>	<i>atry</i>
<i>afterpiece</i>	<i>avast</i>
<i>afterward</i>	<i>*awash</i>
<i>ahoy</i>	<i>aweather</i>
<i>a-hull</i>	<i>aweigh</i>