CZECH EQUIVALENTS OF ENGLISH COMPOUNDS

Milan Smutný

Abstract

The article deals with differences between languages, the differences between lexical systems of English and Czech. I focus on compound substantives, which provide interesting material for studying such differences because they choose a combination of meanings to denote the particular element of extralinguistic reality. Two language communities do not have the same needs. Various features or phenomena are important in language speaking communities and thus this combination is not the same in different languages. I compared English compound substantives to their Czech equivalents to find out, describe and analyse semantic differences in expressing the components of the English compound in Czech. The study shows the differences in the combinations of meanings the two languages use to denote the same element of extralinguistic reality and the differences in the perception of extralinguistic reality by the speakers of the two languages compared.

1   Differences in lexical systems on a cognitive basis

Comparing lexical systems of any two languages reveals the fact that they are not identical; we will see differences, asymmetry and gaps. What is the cause of these differences? Extralinguistic reality is not the same in different language communities. Sometimes there is not any suitable parallel to some element of reality of some other community. Extralinguistic reality sometimes contains elements which are similar or have the same function in the community, but are not identical. Sometimes the elements of extralinguistic reality are the same and different language communities analyse them in different ways. Some languages are rich in the terminology of some semantic domain, sometimes a higher abstract is missing in the language (Vachek 1992: 19-21, Hladký & Růžička 1996: 35-36).

Extralinguistic reality is processed in its essential features by human cognition as a concept. The essential features are those that are needed for effective communication between the users of the particular language. There has been a wide range of theories and opinions explaining how the conceptual categories are acquired. They claim that the cognitive system is learned entirely through experience from one's environment, while others claim that the cognitive framework does not have to be learned as it is a part of an inherited mental apparatus specific to the human species. It is an innate or generally inherited capability, which all human beings are 'programmed' from birth to develop (Leech 1981: 27). Sapir and Whorf represent the theory of language acquisition through the exposure of children to different cultural environments, in which they learn different languages. In this way they explain how children come

to learn different conceptualizations of experience. In their opinion each language represents a unique way of viewing the world and imposes this outlook on its speakers. The system of a language is not merely a system for voicing ideas, but rather is itself the 'shaper of ideas', the programme and guide for the individual's mental activity (Whorf 1956: 212). On the other hand, Chomsky represents the theory of innate ideas. (An analysis of these theories and concept learning is presented by Ullmann 1964: 120-121, 250-252, Leech 1981: 25-30).

Languages differ in the way they classify experience. They "have a tendency to impose structure upon the real world by treating some distinctions as crucial, and ignoring others" (Leech 1981: 26). We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages (Whorf 1956: 212). They choose some elements of extralinguistic reality and omit others which, for various reasons, are not important. This is due to the influence of environment, living conditions, cultural and historical experience. A language is a system of signs which meets the elaborate cultural and communal needs of human societies. The signs are socially motivated; they have been developed to express social meanings (Widdowson 2000: 14). Each environment and each culture creates its own particular problems and needs.

These differences can be seen even within one language community. The development of knowledge, discovery of new objects, phenomena, qualities, circumstances or imagination create new needs for a language community. As the community develops and culture progresses, experts make words that are not known to everyone in the community and cannot be understood without difficulties by laymen. The meaning is given by social and professional contexts. Specific knowledge is necessary for understanding it (Gasser 2006, Krhutová 2006).

2   Differences in Compounds

Compound words provide interesting material for studying such differences between languages, for studying the different ways language communities perceive, understand and classify extralinguistic reality. The meaning of the compound is derived from the combined meanings of its components. Compound words not only refer to the element of extralinguistic reality, but at the same time they choose some other idea, some feature characterizing the element. Thus, they are combinations of ideas, combinations of meanings. The meanings of the components are put in a particular relationship and fused together to create a new semantic unit with a new meaning that dominates the individual meanings of the components (Ginzburg et al. 1966: 184). Two language communities do not have the same needs and consequently choose different ideas to determine the same element of reality. Let us compare, for example, the English compound substantive *lifeboat* and Czech

záchranný člun. The English language characterizes the element of extralinguistic reality (a special kind of boat) by expressing the idea of the result of the action; the boat is used to save people's lives. The Czech language chooses a different idea – the action itself. If we compare compound words and their equivalents in other languages we come across many differences of a similar kind which illustrate differences in understanding, perception and classifying extralinguistic reality by different language communities and, at the same time, different needs of the particular language speaking communities.

3   English compounds and their Czech equivalents

I studied the differences between English compounds and their Czech equivalents on 4,500 items obtained from Czech translations of English literature and English translations of Czech literature. The English compound substantives were compared to the Czech counterparts and each part was compared to the ideas used in Czech to determine the same element of extralinguistic reality. It was the aim of the study to find out if both parts of the English compound substantive are expressed in Czech or not and if the ideas contained in the individual parts are expressed with or without a semantic difference. I described the pattern which characterizes semantic differences in determining the same element of extralinguistic reality by the two languages.

Czech equivalents of the English compound substantives can be divided into nine groups:

1) Both parts of the English compound substantive, determinant and determinatum, are expressed in Czech with no semantic difference: *goodwill – dobrá vůle, newcomer – nově příchozí, waterfall – vodopád, landowner – majitel pozemku, sword-dance – mečový tanec, moonlight – měsíční světlo*

This makes the biggest group: 38 per cent of the studied material.

2) Both parts of the English compound substantive, determinant and determinatum, are expressed in Czech with a semantic difference in the determinant.
   a) the determinant of the English compound denotes the action for which the object is used; in Czech the place where the object can be found or the object of the action are denoted: *reading lamp – stolní lampička, cookstove – kuchyňská kamna, drive-in movie – kino v přírodě, feeding bottle – láhev pro kojence*
   b) the determinant of the English compound denotes the place where the object is used; in Czech the action for which the object is used is denoted: *table-knives – jídelní nože*
   c) the determinant of the English compound denotes an action; in Czech a

characteristic feature or quality of the object is denoted: *stand-up tables – vysoké stoly*

d) the determinant of the English compound denotes a place characterizing the person; in Czech a personality feature is denoted: *altar-boy – zbožný chlapec*

e) the determinant of the English compound denotes a place; in Czech the action for which the object is used is denoted: *coast road – vyhlídková silnice, gatehouse – strážní domek, station office – dopravní kancelář*

f) the determinant of the English compound denotes a place; in Czech an action is denoted: *church-time – čas pobožnosti*

g) the determinant of the English compound denotes a place where the object can be found; in Czech a characteristic feature of the object, time or a relation to other objects are denoted: *country lanes – vedlejší silnice, city station – hlavní nádraží, side table – malý stolek, bedside table – noční stolek*

h) the determinant of the English compound denotes the result of the action; in Czech the action itself is denoted: *cigarette-machine – strojek na točení cigaret, lifebelt – záchranný pás, life-jacket – záchranná vesta*

i) the determinant of the English compound denotes the object characterizing the purpose; in Czech a place is denoted: *glove compartment – přihrádka vedle volantu, lunch table – stůl v jídelně*

j) the determinant of the English compound denotes the purpose; in Czech the period of time when the object is used or the quality of the object are denoted: *business suit – sváteční oblek, breakfast dress – ranní úbor, graph paper – milimetrový papír*

k) the determinant of the English compound denotes the period of time when the object is used; in Czech the colour of the object is denoted: *evening clothes – tmavé šaty*

l) the determinant of the English compound denotes the contents of a document or a book; in Czech different contents, a different purpose or the target reader are denoted: *copyright law – autorské právo, traffic tickets - lístky na tramvaj, marriage book – příručka pro novomanžele*

m) the determinant of the English compound denotes the purpose of the action; in Czech a place of the action is denoted: *burial prayer – modlitba nad hrobem*

n) the determinant of the English compound denotes the object of the action; in Czech the action is denoted: *dog tags – identifikační štítky*

o) a different object of the action is denoted in each language: *jawbreakers – jazykolamy, axle-grease – kolomaz*

p) a different relation to a place is denoted in each language: *homeland – mateřská země*

q) a different quality or a characteristic feature of the object is denoted in each language: *pinfeathers – tuhé peří, pinewoods – jehličnaté lesy*

r) a different place where the object can be found and which characterizes it is denoted in each language: *bedlight – lampička na nočním stolku, doorbell – domovní zvonek, farm-boys – venkovští hoši, sea-chest – lodní kufr*

s) a different action for which the object is used is denoted in each language*: construction paper – kreslicí papír*

t) a different purpose of the object is denoted in each language: *carrier bag – příruční taška*

u) a different time specification of the object is used in each language: *life-mask – posmrtná maska*

v) a different movement of the object is denoted in each language: *drawbridge – padací most*

This group makes 9 per cent of the studied material.

3) Both parts of the English compound substantive are expressed in Czech with a semantic difference in the determinatum.

a) the determinatum of the English compound substantive denotes a man in general; in Czech an action or a profession is denoted: *doormen – strážci u vchodu, garage-man – garážmistr, woodmen – lesní dělníci*

b) the determinatum of the English compound substantive denotes time; in Czech an action is denoted: *coffee-time – podávání kávy*

c) the determinatum of the English compound substantive denotes a characteristic of the movement; in Czech the movement itself is denoted: *snail's pace – hlemýždí krok*

d) a different place is denoted in each language: *trading floor – obchodní oddělení*

e) a different period of time is denoted in each language: *working day – pracovní doba*

f) a different action is denoted in each language: *firefighting – hašení ohně, haymaking – senoseč, handshake – stisk rukou, bookseller – knihkupec*

g) a different group of people is denoted in each language: *security staff – bezpečnostní složka*

h) a different object or phenomenon is denoted in each language: *hourglasses – přesýpací hodiny, bookcase – police s knihami, nightdress – noční košile, fog-bank – mrak mlhy, luggage rack – prostor pro zavazadla, sunlight – paprsky slunce*

These differences make 7 per cent of the studied material.

4) Both parts of the English compound substantive are expressed in Czech with a semantic difference in each part: *lawbender – žonglér s paragrafy, bloodhound – vlkodav, slot machines – výherní automaty, wheelchair – invalidní vozík, dustbin – odpadkový koš, windscreen – přední sklo, bag-carriers – nohsledi, beachcombers – hledači ztracených předmětů*

This difference makes 4 per cent of the studied material.

5) The determinant of the English compound substantive remains unexpressed; the determinatum is expressed with no semantic difference.

The Czech language does not express:

a) the quality of the object: *flat-iron – žehlička, handiwork – dílo, thorn-bush – křoviska*

b) the time characteristic of the object, a phenomenon or the action: *daylight – světlo, daydream – snění*

c) the agent of the action: *feet-stamping – dupání, rabbit-bites - ohryzávání*

d) the object of the action: *street-sweeping – metařství, weight-lifting – vzpěračství, storyteller – vypravěč, light-switch – vypínač, timeprint – záznam, childbirth - porod*

e) the place characterizing the object or the action: *houseguest – host, schoolteacher – učitel, seashells – lastury, river-boats – lodi, doorsteps – schody, bedcover – pokrývka, necktie – kravata, house-party – večírek, stage-fright – tréma*

f) the purpose for which the object is used: *warheads – hlavice, flightbags – kabely*

g) the action for which the place is used: *business office – kancelář*

h) an object characterizing the purpose of what is denoted by the determinatum: *bird cage – klec, suitcase – kufr, coffee cup – šálek*

i) the material from which the object is made: *snowballs – koule*

j) the user of the place: *carriage road – silnice*

In some cases the determinant of the English compound is unexpressed in Czech because it is understood from the context: *cooking oil – olej, handbell – zvonek, snowball – koule*. In other cases it is not expressed in Czech at all: *shaving razor – břitva, motor car – auto, schoolteacher – učitel, eyesight – zrak*. In some cases the determinant of the English compound substantive is expressed by a suffix in Czech: *woman artist – umělkyně*.

These differences make 8 per cent of the studied material.

6) The determinant of the English compound substantive is expressed with no semantic difference, the determinatum remains unexpressed or is expressed by a suffix: *hiding place – úkryt, working day – práce, nightfall – noc,*

girlfriend – dívka, videotape – video, soundtrack – zvuk, sunlight – slunce, daylight – den, footsoldier – pěšák, countryman – krajan, schoolboy – školák, swordfish – mečoun, air-rifle – vzduchovka, steamship – parník, windbreaker – větrovka, mother-tongue – mateřština, name card – jmenovka, hunger strike – hladovka

This group makes 14 per cent of the studied material.

7) Czech uses a single word which is semantically different from both parts of the English compound substantive. One part of the compound substantive is expressed with a semantic difference, the other part is expressed by a suffix (for example, the English word *lifeguard* and Czech *plavčík*: the determinant *life* is different from *plavat*, *guard* is expressed by a suffix) or remains unexpressed (*homeland – vlast*). Both English and Czech units denote the same element of extralinguistic reality; each language chooses a different characteristic feature, a different idea to denote it.

   a) the determinant of the English compound denotes an action; in Czech the result of the action is denoted: *waiting list – pořadník, workhouse – káznice*

   b) the determinant of the English compound denotes an action; in Czech the object of the action is denoted: *caretaker – domovník*

   c) the determinant of the English compound denotes the place of the action; in Czech the object of the action is denoted: *stage-hand – kulisák*

   d) the determinant of the English compound denotes the means of the action; in Czech the action itself is denoted: *horsemen – jezdci*

   e) the determinant of the English compound denotes the object of the action; in Czech the action is denoted: *breakfast-room – jídelna, coat-tree – věšák*

   f) the determinant of the English compound denotes the purpose of the object; in Czech a relation to other objects is denoted: *farmhouse – samota*

   g) a different action is denoted in each language: *salesman – cesťák, fighter-plane – bombardér, game-keeping – myslivost*

   h) a different object characterizing the place is denoted in each language: *locker-room – šatna*

   Sometimes we cannot find any kind of the above mentioned relations between the individual parts of the English compound substantive and the Czech word: *backbone- páteř, windfall – zbohatnutí, seaweeds – chaluhy, backstroke – znak.*

This is the second biggest group making up 15 per cent of the studied material.

8) A description or explanation is used in Czech to express the idea contained in the English compound substantive. It is a nominal structure: *painkillers –*

tabletky proti bolestem, stove hood – odsávač par nad sporákem, door panels – zasklené výplně vstupních dveří, pigeonholes – otevřené přihrádky na dopisy, bottlenecks – překážky hladkého průběhu výroby, gas rights – práva na těžbu zemního plynu, coffee break – chvilka oddechu s šálkem kávy. Or a verb structure: *washday – den, kdy se právalo, workcrew – skupina, která pracovala na stavbě, horsewomen – ženský, co uměj jezdit na koni, clock tower – věž, v níž byly umístěny hodiny*.

This group makes 4 per cent of the studied material.

9) The English compound substantive is used in Czech

   a) it is used with the original English spelling: *copyright – copyright, trademark – trademark, walkman – walkman, surfrider – surfrider, barman – barman, snack bar – snack bar, paperbacks – paperbacky, week-end – weekend*

   b) it is used with the Czech spelling: *disc jockey – diskžokej, bull-terrier – bulteriér, airplane – eroplán, trolleybus – trolejbus, beefsteaks – bifteky, runway – ranvej*

c) the English compound substantive can be translated by another English substantive which is a part of the Czech lexical system: *elevator boy, elevator guy – liftboy*

This group makes 1 per cent of the studied material.

The percentage of the types of differences

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
38%	9%	7%	4%	8%	14%	15%	4%	1%

4 Conclusion

Many studies and analyses show that languages influence and shape the way we understand the world. Boroditsky (2001) studied Mandarin and English speakers' understanding of time. The differences between languages are reflected in the way the speakers think about time. Mandarin speakers describe time as vertical and thus think about time vertically, while English speakers understand time horizontally. The experiment proves that languages can play the most important role in shaping how their speakers think. Lipka (2002: 62ff) analysed differences between English and German words. For example, the German words *Student* and *Lehrer* do not denote the same class of extralinguistic objects as *student* and *teacher*. In German, there are words *Studentin* and *Lehrerin*, which must be used if the referent is female. Two lexical items in one language (German) converge in a single lexical item in another (English). A different categorization of the same extralinguistic reality by different

languages is explained by the fact that in the extralinguistic world, there are no clear-cut borderlines or distinctions. They are only drawn in a specific language. "By such language-specific categorization we impose a certain structure on extralinguistic reality" (Lipka 2002: 71). Compounds, which are combinations of meanings, combinations of ideas, and their equivalents in other languages, reflect a different understanding and classification of reality by different language communities and different needs of the communities. Thus, they can be used for studying the above mentioned issues. The choice of the constituents and the relation between them reflect the way language speaking communities think about, process and analyse extralinguistic reality.

The presented analysis is based on translations. It may be influenced by translation shifts, which have been widely studied and discussed. Despite these shifts, the source language and the target language provide suitable and objective material. The translator must start by decoding the units and structures which carry the meaning. Equivalence at the word level is the first element to be taken into consideration by the translator (Baker 1992: 11-12, Leonardi 2000). A detailed analysis of the problems of contrastive studies, the differences, changes and shifts found in translations, is presented by Santos (1995). She finds the use of translations the best unbiased way to get objective data, …"provided that we are aware of the relativity of each language's concepts, and of the distortions possibly brought about by looking at one language with spectacles from another."

From the findings presented in this study and the differences described we can see that there is a significant difference in the understanding and classification of extralinguistic reality between English and Czech. In 61 per cent of the material (groups 2-8) we can find a difference between the languages compared. In 20 per cent (groups 2-4) there is a difference in expressing one or both parts of the English compound substantive, and in 37 per cent (groups 5-7) one of the parts remains unexpressed. The whole unit denotes the same element of extralinguistic reality. (Differences in the denoted element of extralinguistic reality have been found in a few statistically unimportant cases.) Different combinations of ideas and meanings are used to denote the same element of extralinguistic reality, different features, parts and qualities of the elements are important in each of the compared languages and for each language speaking community. In this segment of the lexical system, the languages compared classify and describe reality in different ways. The two communities have different needs and demands. The ways the speakers of these two languages capture reality and think about it are different.

One part of the English compound substantive is not expressed or expressed by a suffix in 37 per cent of the items compared (groups 5-7), and only in 2 per cent of the items was a compound used in Czech as an equivalent of the English compound.

This fact is influenced by the analytic character of English, which describes reality in a more detailed, a more explicit way. This is not necessary so in Czech. Whereas the English language uses an independent unit, the Czech language can use a suffix carrying the particular meaning. Thus, there is less need for compounds in the Czech language. In English, compounds are formed more easily. In most cases the constituents do not change their form entering a compound. They can function both in a compound and as independent units in the same form. In Czech, the situation is different. In most cases one of the constituents changes and in the particular form occurring in the compound it cannot function as an independent unit.

The presented study compares English and Czech. Further work is needed to find out whether other languages use different processes in classifying reality or show a similar pattern and structure of the differences between compounds in one language and their equivalents in the other.

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