Nominative Features of Weapon Terms in English

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Abstract In Vietnam, vocabulary in general and scientific terms in particular have been attracting much attention from researchers in order to learn about semantics of words in different fields. With the aim of having a better understanding of ways of naming weapons and semantics of weapon terms in English, this study will investigate nominative features which are employed to name weapons. The investigation shows that there are 20 distinctive nominative features used to name 907 weapon terms. Among them, the feature purpose/function is most employed with the frequency of 346 out of 907 terms (accounting for 38.14%), even much more frequently than the second most frequently used feature, component (133 out of 907, accounting for 14.66%). Whereas sound, state, quantity, time and color are features used just once. The results show that there are a number of ways to name weapons in English and that there is a tendency to make use of the features purpose/function, component, manoeuvrability, manner and assignment/equipment to give specific names to weapons. And it can be referred that they are the most helpful characteristics needed expressing in names of weapons or inventing for weapons. In addition, nominative features are usually minor elements preceding main ones in weapon terms’ structures and making a difference to other terms.

Keywords: nomination, nominative feature, term, weapon, weapon term


1. Introduction

Nowadays, in the linguistic field in Vietnam, vocabulary in general and scientific terms have been attracting much attention from researchers in order to learn about their semantic features in different domains. For scientific terms, a large number of studies have carried out in different domains such as medicine, mechanics, press, criminal science, military and so on.

In the domain of military science, Vietnamese military terms have been studied in terms of characteristics and formation in [1] and in terms of formation and nomination in [7]. However, English military terms have not been paid much attention by researchers. In this study, we will carry out an investigation into nominative features of English weapon terms. It is because studying nomination is also interesting and useful to learn about how weapons are given names and to learn about semantics of those names. Another reason is that English weapon terms is a subcategory of military terms that has a diverse number of weapons that have been being invented continuously thanks to applying achievements of advanced technology and science.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Terms and Weapon Terms

2.1.1. Terms

As referred in [3], terms are defined in different ways because they are seen in different approaches such as concept, function, cognition and terminology. However, we viewed terms as words or phrases that express concepts, things, phenomena or activities in a particularly scientific or specialized field.

2.1.2. Weapon Terms

According to Vietnamese military encyclopedia dictionary, weapon is defined as “a technical device or a system of technical devices used to destroy enemies in armed warfare. It includes a direct part killing targets (sword, spear, arrow, bomb, round,..), a device taking it to targets (bow, crossbow, gun, artillery, missile,...)” ([4], p.1179).

However, the intension of the definition above does not contain a few other substances that are often used in armed wars. In fact, Vietnamese soldiers detonated a lot of explosives to destroy bases and vehicles of their French
and American opponents in wars in Vietnam. Besides, American defense force’s aircrafts used to scatter different chemical agents over Vietnam’s forests to make it clear to seek Vietnamese soldiers and to damage their combat capacities. Therefore, explosives and military chemical agents should be considered as weapons.

Therefore, in this study we will view weapons as “substances, technical devices or a system of technical devices used to destroy enemies in armed warfare. It includes a direct part killing targets (poison, explosive, sword, spear, arrow, bomb, round,...), a device taking it to targets (bow, crossbow, gun, artillery, missile,...)”.

2.2. Nomination

Nomination is one of basic functions of language, the function of naming things and phenomena and so on. According to Consansky, nomination is “to fix (or attach) a linguistic symbol to a concept - a signifier that reflects certain characteristics of a denotation - attributes, qualities and relationship of objects and processes in the physical and mental scope, thus, the linguistic units form content elements of verbal communication” as cited in [[5], p.191].

And Nguyen stated that nomination is the formation of linguistic units with functions of naming, splitting segments of the objective reality that serve the basis for forming corresponding concepts of them in form of words, phrases, phraseology and sentences [[6], p. 89].

In the study, we agree with Nguyen, who states briefly that nomination is to give a name to a thing, a phenomenon, an action, a process, ... [[5], p.191]. Then, how does the nomination process take place?

Gak argues that the nomination process is often associated with sorting behavior. He says: "In natural language, the process of naming is inevitably associated with the sorting behavior. If it is necessary to denote an object X without a name in a language, then on the basis of features extracted from this object, it is referred to the concept "A" or "B" which that language has its own way of denoting and giving a corresponding name” as cited in [[5], p. 192]. In a nutshell, the nomination process consists of 2 steps: (1) classifying concepts of objects nominated and (2) selecting a distinctive feature [[5], p. 192-194].

3. Nominative Features of English Weapon Terms

3.1. Nominative Units in Weapon Terms

On the basis of the definition about weapons discussed in Section 2.1.2, we have collected a majority of 986 English weapon terms in [2] and a minority of them in other military English courses for cadets in military schools in Vietnam. These weapon terms can be divided into 2 groups corresponding with 2 nominative units in terms of form and semantics.

Group 1 consists of 79 terms which each has one element used to name various types of weapons such as bomb, gun, shell, grenade, sword, bow, missile, mine, tank, artillery. We call these terms originally nominative terms because they are etyma so they do not have any nominative features to examine. Although Group 1 has 79 out of 986 (accounting for 8.01%), it plays a rather important role in generating derivatively nominative terms.

Group 2 consists of 907 out of 986 terms, accounting for 91.99%. These are terms composed of two or more than two elements that combine each other to name weapons in more detail. We call these terms derivatively nominative terms. These are the terms, which the study will examine to identify nominative features of weapon terms through their structures. The derivatively nominative terms can be formed in the minor-main structure, in which the main element follows the minor ones and has denotes a generally conceptual classification and one or minor elements precede and serves a function of specifying the main element and making a difference to other terms. For example, the main element “grenade” in chemical grenade and antitank grenade follows minor elements - chemical and antitank and denotes a generally conceptual classification, while the minor elements - chemical and antitank serves a function of specifying the main element and making a difference to other terms. Or the derivative terms can be formed in the main - minor structure like the term agent orange (the main element agent precedes and is followed by the minor element orange).

3.2. Nominative Features of English Weapon Terms

In order to identify nominative features of English weapon terms, we will focus on analyzing the conceptual classification of 907 derivatively nominative terms belonging to Group 2 mentioned above.

As a result of the investigation, we found that there are a number of different nominative features selected to name 907 derivatively nominative terms in Group 2. Below are concrete nominative features:

Purpose/function is a feature employed to name 346 out of 907 (346/907) terms, accounting for 38.14%. For example, in terms such as antiaircraft tank, mine-clearing tank, trap mine, antiremoval mine, antitank mine, the minor elements - antiaircraft, mine-clearing, trap, antiremoval and antitank denote the feature on purpose/function, specifying the main elements following them and making a difference to other terms.

Component is a feature which are made use to give names to 133/907 terms, accounting for 14.66%. For example, in terms such as napalm bomb, petrol bomb, germ bomb, biological bomb, winged bomb, the minor elements - napalm, petrol, germ, biological, winged denote the feature on component, specifying the main elements behind them and making a difference to other terms.

Manner is a feature employed to name 65/907 terms, accounting for 7.16%. For instance, in terms such as improvised mine, snagline mine, step-upon mine, magnetic antitank mine, radio-controlled mine, the minor elements - improvised, snagline, step-upon, magnetic antitank, radio-controlled denote the feature on manner, specifying the main elements following them and making a difference to other terms.

Manoeuvrability is a feature that is made use to name 85/907 terms, accounting for 9.37%. For instance, in terms such as mobile anti-aircraft gun, man-propelled gun, man-portable artillery, anchored mine and buoyant mine,
the minor elements - mobile, man-propelled, man-portable, anchored and buoyant denote the feature on manoeuvrability, specifying the main elements behind them and making a difference to other terms.

Assignment/Equipment is a feature which is utilized to name 53/907 terms, accounting for 5.84%. For instance, in terms such as fleet ballistic missile, airborne missile, army missile, artillery missile and mortar shell the minor elements - fleet, airborne, army, artillery and mortar denote the feature on Assignment/Equipment, specifying the main elements following them and making a difference to other terms.

Launch location and target location is a feature used to name 43/907 terms, accounting for 4.74%. For example, in terms such as air-to-surface guided missile, underwater-to-surface missile, air-to-air guided missile, underwater-to-air missile, ground-to-air guided missile, the minor elements - air-to-surface, underwater-to-surface, air-to-air, underwater-to-air and ground-to-air denote the feature on launch location and target location, specifying the main elements behind them and making a difference to other terms.

Rank is a feature that is employed to name 43/907 terms, accounting for 4.74%. For instance, in terms such as light gun, heavy machine gun, medium bomber, superheavy bomber, front-line fighter and destroyer leader, the minor elements - light, heavy, medium, superheavy, front-line denote the feature on rank, specifying the main elements following them and making a difference to other terms. However, for the term destroyer leader, the minor element - leader which denotes the feature on rank, follows the main element - destroyer, and specifies it and makes a difference to other terms.

Operation range is a feature that are made use to give names to 28/907 terms, accounting for 3.08%. For example, in terms such as long-range strategic missile, medium-range guided missile, short-range attack missile, intercontinental bomber, superrange gun, the minor elements - long-range, medium-range, short-range, intercontinental, superrange denote the feature on operation range, specifying the main elements behind them and making a difference to other terms.

Location is a feature which is utilized to name 25/907 terms, accounting for 2.75%. For instance, in terms such as landmine, ground mine, bottom mine, water mine, space interceptor, the minor elements - land, ground, bottom, water, space denote the feature on location, specifying the main elements following them and making a difference to other terms.

Levels of control is a feature utilized to name 33/907 terms, accounting for 3.63%. For example, in terms such as guided missile, unguided missile, unmanned combat aerial vehicle, terminally guided submunitions, the minor elements - guided, unguided, unmanned, terminally guided denote the feature on levels of control, specifying the main elements behind them and making a difference to other terms.

Speed is a feature that is used to name 14/907 terms, accounting for 1.54%. For instance, in terms such as neaursonic missile, hypervelocity missile, subsonic aircraft, hypersonic aircraft, express rifle, the minor elements - neaursonic, hypervelocity, subsonic, hypersonic, express denote the feature on speed, specifying the main elements following them and making a difference to other terms.

Energy is a feature employed to name 9/907 terms, accounting for 0.99%. For example, in terms such as laser gun, atomic aircraft carrier, nuclear-powered attack aircraft carrier, atomic submarine, laser rifle, the minor elements - laser, atomic, nuclear-powered, atomic, laser denote the feature on energy, specifying the main elements behind them and making a difference to other terms.

Scope of mission is a characteristic which is made use to name 9/907 terms, accounting for 0.99%. For instance, in terms such as strategic ballistic missile, tactical infantry missile, strategic bomber, tactical light bomber, the minor elements - strategic, tactical, strategic, tactical denote the feature on scope of mission, specifying the main elements following them and making a difference to other terms.

Shape is a characteristic employed to name 8/907 terms, accounting for 0.88%. For example, in terms such as barrel bomb, pipe bomb, parcel bomb, letter bomb, crossbow, the minor elements - barrel, pipe, parcel, letter, cross denote the feature on shape, specifying the main elements behind them and making a difference to other terms.

Size is a feature employed to name 8/907 terms, accounting for 0.88%. For instance, in terms such as baby bomb, parent bomb, bomblet, broadsword, linear explosive charge, the minor elements - baby, parent, let, broad, linear denote the feature on size, specifying the main elements behind them and making a difference to other terms.

Sound, quantity, time, and state are features that are all made use to name just 1/907 terms. They appear respectively in terms such as shrieking bomb, six-shooter, night bomber and plastic explosive, the minor elements - shrieking, six, night and plastic denote respectively the features on sound, quantity, time, and state, specifying the main elements following them and making a difference to other terms.

Color is also the feature used to name just one term, agent orange. However, it is formed in the main - minor structure, which the minor element - orange denote the feature on color, specifying the main element ahead it and making a difference to other terms.

3.3. Remarks

From the findings mentioned above, we can see that there are an amount of different nominative features employed to name 907 English weapon terms in Group 2, which have two elements or more. Nominative features are made use with various frequencies. Specifically, there are 20 distinctive nominative features selected to name these English weapon terms.

Among these nominative features, purpose/function is the feature which is most frequently employed to name English weapon terms. It appears in 346 out of 907 derivatively nominative terms. And it is very clear that the feature purpose/function is made use much more than component, which is the second most frequently employed feature to name 133 out of 907 derivatively nominative terms, accounting for 14.66%. The next nominative features, which are also frequently employed, are manoeuvrability (85/907), manner (65/907), and assignment/equipment (53/907) respectively.
Whereas sound, quantity, time, state and color are features used just once to name English weapon terms. In addition, a large majority of 907 derivatively nominative terms are formed in the minor - main structure. Whereas nominative features are usually minor elements preceding main ones, specifying main elements and making a difference to other terms. Whereas there are very few derivatively nominative terms that are formed in the main - minor structure like the term agent orange.

Nominative features employed to name English weapon terms can be summarized in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Number of terms</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Number of terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>purpose/function</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>speed</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>component</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>energy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manoeuvrability</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>scope of mission</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manner</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>shape</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assignment/equipment</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>size</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>launch location</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>sound</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rank</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>color</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>levels of control</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>quantity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>operation range</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>time</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>location</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>state</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These statistics show that there are an amount of ways to name weapons in English and that there is a tendency to make use of the features purpose/function, component, manoeuvrability, manner and assignment/equipment to give specific names to weapons. And it can be referred that they are the most helpful characteristics needed expressing in names of weapons or inventing for weapons. Among them, purpose/function is most preferred and are utilized much more frequently than other ones to give specific names to weapons. In addition, a large majority of nominative features are usually minor elements preceding main ones, specifying main elements in weapon terms’ structures and making a difference to other terms. Whereas there are very few nominative features that are minor elements following main ones like the term agent orange.

5. Recommendations

The scope of this paper just takes consideration into nominative features of weapon terms in English, so it is possible, in another paper, to make a contrastive comparison in ways of naming weapon terms between English and Vietnamese or any other languages. The results will show similarities and differences in ways of giving names to weapon terms between languages contrasted. Those things may be helpful for both teaching and learning military English.

4. Conclusion

In general, there are a large number of different nominative features used to name the English weapon terms. These features are employed with various frequencies. Specifically, there are 20 distinctive nominative features used to name weapon terms. Purpose/function is the feature, which is used with the highest frequency, appearing in 346 out of 907 derivatively nominative terms, accounting for 38.14%. This feature is also utilized much more frequently than other features, even in comparison with the second most frequently used feature, component (133/907, accounting for 14.66%). Consecutive features are manoeuvrability (85/907), manner (65/907) and assignment/equipment (53/907) respectively. Meanwhile, sound, quantity, time, state and color are used just once to name weapon terms.

References