

of communicative purposes relevant to real-world, academic, and professional environments.

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ENGLISH PROVERBS OF NAUTICAL ORIGIN

АНГЛІЙСЬКІ ПРИСЛІВ'Я МОРСЬКОГО ПОХОДЖЕННЯ

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Proverb is defined as the wisdom of the people, concentrated in a metaphoric saying in contemporary English lexicography. Compare: 'a brief familiar maxim of folk wisdom, usually compressed in form' [3, p. 804]; 'a short, well-known, supposedly wise saying' [2, p. 1058]. Proverbs root back to professional crafts and/or everyday routine situations. Here we shall investigate the proverbs originated in the nautical domain. Proverbs are usually of metaphoric origin, but during our research we singled out several groups that can be united by common creatria.

The first group of proverbs embrace the names of the *objects on board*. These names are the specific nautical terms that were originally used as nautical slang but later historically they entered the common English language in metaphoric sayings. The majority of native English speakers

may not know the nautical background of these expressions but they know and widely use them in contemporary proverbs.

One of such picturesque proverbs is: ***Between the devil and the deep blue sea*** – nowadays the expression means ‘*facing two choices, both of which are unpleasant*’ [2, p. 348]; ‘in a dilemma, faced with two choices, which are both unwelcome’ [3, p. 262], in other words to be in trouble. Compare with Ukrainian ‘між двома вогнями’. Historically the expression was used on boats where the *devil* was the name given to a seam between two planks which had to be repacked with oakum to prevent it from leaking. The *devil seam* was the most difficult to handle because it lay next to the keel, so the seaman, who repacked it would have to hang from a rope, suspended between this seam and the deep sea. Another explanation is that it was the outside seam of the deck planks next to the scuppers. This would have made it the longest seam and the most difficult to do due to the spray coming over the side. In bad weather a man knocked over by a sea would be washed into the scuppers to find him literally *between the devil seam and the deep sea*. [1, pp. 8–9].

No room to swing a cat – another interesting expression which is used by English speakers nowadays. It means a *confined space, a room, a house* or any other area which is too small to do something spacious in it. The question is, why a cat and no other animal. The answer lies in the nautical origin of this expression. ‘*Cat*’ is the sailors’ abbreviation for the ‘*cat-o’-nine-tails*’, a nine-lashed whip to punish sailors for any guilt or fault. The punishment was conducted on deck in the space between the poop and the deck, quite a restricted area, so the boatswain who conducted the punishment, should have got enough skill to perform the execution. [5, p. 24]. In contemporary English the expression is metaphoric and has nothing to do with punishment.

Catch a packet – today this proverb means ‘get into serious trouble’ [2, p. 948]. Originally it comes from a nautical expression ‘*packet ship*’ – a fast vessel that plied regularly between one port and another; ‘a boat sailing a regular route carrying passengers, mail and packages’ [3, p. 720]; ‘a boat that carries mail and passengers at regular time between the places’ [2, p. 948]. The name goes back to the 16th century when State Letters and Dispatches were known as ‘the packet’ and their carriage we entrusted to these fast ships. The term ‘*to catch a packet*’ with its meaning of landing in trouble, might come from the American-owned North Atlantic packets of the mid-19th century which had a reputation amongst seamen as being particularly hard ships. In all events a trip in a packet ship must have been a miserable experience since their hulls were not ‘sea kindly’ and to make good time they had to be driven hard. This would have meant wet and uncomfortable conditions for the travelers [1, p. 18].

Rats from a sinking ship – in contemporary English the proverb means ‘to escape the unpleasant, problematic or risky situation very quickly’; ‘to walk out on a project because it seems doomed’ [1, p. 65]. This expression is also of nautical origin. Sailors believed that the sight of rats coming out of the ship’s holds was a portent of disaster. The rats frequently inhabited the bilge which was the first place to be flooded should the vessel be foundering. On the other hand, the sailors being superstitious, believed that rats had a sixth sense and would leave the ship in port feeling the coming disaster. The vivid historic example of this dates back to 1923 at the San Francisco Navy Yard where the seamen saw the rats leaving the *USS Young*. The following day in an unprecedented disaster the *Young* along with six more destroyers piled up on the rocks on passage to San Diego [1, p. 65].

In the second group we included the proverbs whose metaphoric essence is prevailing: ***To chew the fat*** – in contemporary English this proverb means ‘to have a long conversation about many subjects’ [2, p.206]. The origin dates back to the nautical slang. In the days when brine was added to barrels of meat for preservation it had a hardening effect on the fat. It was still edible but it took considerable chewing, so ‘to chew the fat’ has come to mean ‘to talk endlessly’ [1, p. 19].

Flogging a dead horse – now the proverb means ‘to waste time or effort by returning to a subject or argument which has already been settled’ [2, p. 491]; ‘to waste one’s efforts trying to stir up enthusiasm for something people have lost interest in [3, p.361]. Originally it derives from a nautical term ‘dead horse’ which meant the first month at sea. The seamen would have been usually paid for their first month and the money was spent very quickly. So, it seemed to them, with the money all gone, that the first month was spent working for nothing. To mark the end of the ‘dead horse’ month the crew would make an effigy of a horse and parade it around the decks (on passenger ships money would be collected), then with great noise and celebration the horse would be hoisted to the end of the yard, cut down and dropped into the sea. No doubt there was an established understanding of beating a dead animal to work, but to ship’s officers ‘flogging a dead horse’ described the difficulty of getting the crew to do any extra work during the first month at sea [1, p. 34].

Out of the blue – today the proverb means ‘unexpectedly’ [2, p. 121]; ‘without any warning’ [3, p. 105]. The expression comes from the nautical English where it means the unexpected storm coming shortly after the clear blue sky that never warned of any trouble.

Under the weather – this common saying in contemporary English means ‘to be slightly ill’ [2, p. 1485]; ‘feeling slightly ill’ [3, p. 1115]. Originally on board a boat the expression meant ‘to feel seasick or to be

adversely affected by bad weather' [1, p. 90]. The term correctly sounded like '*under the weather bow*', which is a gloomy prospect. The weather bow is the side upon which all the rotten weather is blowing.

The third group of proverbs that we investigated here is connected with some prominent people or events that historically paid tribute to marine business development.

To turn a blind eye – this proverb in modern English means 'to pretend not to see or notice, especially something illegal' [2, p. 118]. *Turning a blind eye* stems from the famous incident during the battle of Copenhagen when Admiral Nelson, as second in command, complained he could not see the flag signal from his superior who ordered him to break off the bombardment. He had deliberately placed the telescope to his blind eye, and proceeded to ignore the order, with glorious results. [1, p. 11–12].

Another interesting expression in today's colloquial English is '***all shipshape and Bristol fashion***' which means 'to have things well organized, in proper order, ready for instance use'. The reference is to the methodical way in which a ship and her rigging were equipped, organized and handled. Such a ship and her crew were said to be '*shipshape*' [4, p. 148]

For centuries Bristol was the major port on the English west coast and shipping here was the best regulated and most organized in the country. Hence it used to mean in tip top order, everything neat and tidy [1, p. 74]. In the fourth group we included some typically nautical nouns which were so widely used that they entered many proverbs. In the era of the sailing fleet the safety of navigation depended on the seamen's capability of managing the sails, and the wind could be a good helper when sailors mastered tackling the sails or destroyer when they could not manage all right. That's why the noun *wind* very often appears as a part of common nautical sayings. Here we shall consider several proverbs containing the word '*wind*'.

Take the wind out of someone's sails – in everyday English this proverb means 'to take away someone's confidence or advantage, especially by saying or doing something unexpected' [2, p. 1502]; 'to frustrate someone by saying what he was about to say, giving the reasons he was about to give' [3, p. 1126]. 'put a sudden and surprising end to someone's overconfidence' [4, p. 183]. The expression originates from the nautical meaning of 'to sail to the windward of a sailing vessel' [3, p. 1126].

Whistling for a wind – in general English the proverb means 'to hope for the impossible'. It was the sailor's superstition that he could call up the desired wind by whistling, a belief still current amongst some yachtsmen. Yet whistling on ships has been either forbidden or discouraged for many years for different reasons. Firstly, the sound of a whistle could be confused with orders piped on the boatswain's call (or whistle), it could also be a signal of commencement of a mutiny on board, and because it is generally

believed that whistling brings to much *wind*, and hence a storm [1, p. 94–95]. It is interesting that *whistling* is considered an unlucky sign in different areas of human activities, thus actors and stage hands avoid whistling backstage. In some cultures, whistling at home is considered bad luck, because it sweeps the money away from the owners.

Before the wind – very fast, from nautical ‘with the wind astern’; ***close to the wind*** – very close to indecency, close to breaking the law, from nautical ‘with the wind almost directly to the bow; [3, p. 1126]; ***in the teeth of the wind, in the wind’s eye*** – against the strength of, in spite of opposition from [2, p. 1359], from nautical ‘with the wind directly on the bow of the boat’ [3, p. 1126].

Another very frequently found ingredient of the contemporary English proverbs is ‘*boat*’, which definitely relates to the nautical domain.

Burning your boats – ‘destroy all means of going back, so that one must go forward’ [2, p. 157]. Historically the term dates back to the times of Spanish conquistador Herman Cortez, who, having reached the shores of Mexico, found his men in no mood to go traipsing off to Yucatan jungle. To drive home the purpose of their mission he had the ship’s boats drawn up on the beach and burnt. Then, with no alternative but to move forward, the conquest of central America could begin. [1, p. 14].

Miss the boat – today the proverb means ‘to lose a good chance, especially by being too slow’ [2, p. 850]; ‘to fail to make advantage of an opportunity’ [3, p.639]. the nautical origin of the expression lies in ‘*missing the liberty boat*’, which carried the sailors returning from the shore leave out to their ships for free. Hence the meaning ‘*to miss the opportunity*’. [1, p 53].

In the same boat – running the same risks or sharing the same misfortunes [3, p. 106]; in the same unpleasant situation, facing the same danger [2, p. 1166]; the connection with nautical meaning is obvious and transparent.

Push the boat out – to make a special effort to make something enjoyable, especially by spending more money than usual [2, p. 1069]. The original nautical expression meant to pay for a round of drinks. Now more widely understood as to celebrate and not trouble about expense [1, p. 63].

Rock the boat – to spoil the good and comfortable situation that exists [2, p. 1137]; from the obvious nautical meaning of spoiling the comfort of sailing by rocking the boat, thus provoking a dangerous situation.

In the study presented above we figured out three main groups of contemporary English proverbs of nautical origin: 1. Objects on board. 2. Pure metaphors. 3. Proverbs connected with prominent people or events. 4. Frequent nautical nouns.

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