Anna Gintowt-Dziwiłł

SOME COMMENTS ON ENGLISH ALCOHOL DRINKING VERBS

There are verbs in English expressing both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinking action, and in this sense they can be used universally. There are others which refer almost exclusively to the consumption of alcohol. The aim of this paper is to discuss and compare some selected English verbs of the latter kind. Many of them carry some specific meaning and are contextually restricted, others are interchangeable. The English language is also rich in numerous phrases and idioms denoting alcohol consumption. Some of them will be given as examples, but they are not the subject of the analyses in this paper.

The analyses will be concentrated on a few selected verbs. Some of the verbs taken into consideration also belong to other semantic fields which have nothing to do with drinking action at all, but these fields will be ignored as irrelevant for this discussion.

Many of the verbs specifically referring to alcohol consumption are not easy to find in dictionaries. As they are more common for spoken than written English, it is not easy to find written examples, either. Therefore, some remarks concerning the semantic, contextual, and usage comparison of these verbs should be useful for non-native speakers of English.

In order to make these analyses most effective some categories of comparison should be distinguished: technique and manner of drinking, quantity of alcohol drunk, the kind of alcohol drunk, the social circumstance of the drinking action, an Agent (specifying social group and sex of Agent), cause/reason of drinking, Speaker’s evaluation, and usage. If irrelevant to the analyses, some of the above-mentioned cat-
Categories can be ignored. The experimental model of the conceptual analyses of verbs presented in another paper by the author (this volume\textsuperscript{1}) will not be used here as needed for more detailed description of the slightest semantic differences between verbs, though the categories above can be recognized as belonging to this model. In this paper they are needed to give the reader some idea about the verbs discussed, not for deep analyses of them.

It is worth mentioning that many verbs denoting alcohol or non-alcohol drinking action are subject to nominalization, which will be illustrated below.

The following verbs have been selected for the discussion:

A. some denoting alcohol and non-alcohol drinking action: to sip, to guzzle;

B. some denoting only alcohol drinking action: to booze, to tope, to tipple, to toss off, to swill, to quaff, to chugalug;

C. some denoting mainly the result of drinking: to fuddle, to intoxicate, to souse;

It should be remembered, however, that the above grouping of verbs is simplified for the purpose of this description.

1. ALCOHOL AND NON-ALCOHOL DRINKING VERBS

TO SIP

The verb to sip refers both to alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, and being in this sense universal is very common, easily found in literature, and frequently used by the representatives of all social groups and generations. It is emotionally neutral, in other words, it does not evoke any special emotional reactions of the Speaker, or the Agent. It refers to any Agent, both male and female\textsuperscript{2}, and has not any special social class-agent distinction. To sip can refer to any social circumstances. The Agent can sip alone or in company in any situation.

What can be sipped? Any drink! For example: tea, coffee, soft drinks, and cocktails or alcohols as sherry, spirits, whisky, brandy, gin, port etc.

\textsuperscript{1} See A. Gintowt-Dziwiłł, \textit{An Experimental Approach to the Conceptual Analyses of English Verbs of Eating and Drinking} (this volume).

\textsuperscript{2} Agent is obviously recognized as Human in reference to all the verbs discussed in this paper.
(1) She took another sip of her tea. [Longman 1989: 982]
(2) Mostyn was early, sitting at one of the circular tables in the foyer, sipping a pink gin, served by an elegant Indian lady. [Gardner 1968: 180]
(3) ... took a shallow spoonful of the liquid and sipped. [Gardner 1968: 142]
(4) With the last sip of brandy, Boysie realized that he was unmistakably contented. [Gardner 1968: 35]

What is the aim of sipping? Consumption - drinking, tasting and slow relishing with maximum enjoyment and no haste.

What technique can be associated with sipping? It is a repeated slow, soundless and genteel drawing in of small quantities of liquid with minimum motion of the lips, with undefined breaks in consumption.

(5) Drink brandy in sips, not gulps. [Hornby 1980: 801]
(6) She couldn’t study, so she would order coffee and sip it slowly. [Keel 1984: 31]
(7) She sipped her drink, forcing herself to go slowly. [Keel 1984: 35]

This technique is recognized as a good - mannered way of drinking, and therefore positively evaluated by the Speaker, although, as mentioned above, it is not associated with any specific emotion.

TO GUZZLE

The verb to guzzle, although it denotes eating as well as drinking, is worth mentioning as it often refers to alcohol drinking.

(8) He’s been guzzling beer all evening. [Longman 1989: 468]
(9) You men should be ashamed of yourself, guzzling down pints of beer just to compete with each other; have you no self-perfect? [Courtney 1989: 271]
(10) He guzzled the whole of his stiffener in one go.

To guzzle is a low - register verb, colloquially used. In the example (9) the verb is strengthened by the preposition down. It reveals the Speaker’s disapproval of the Agent, often called "a guzzler". The Agent is usually represented by a man, or a

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3 Nominalization - very common tendency concerning drinking verbs. (Some more examples of nominalization are later presented in this paper).

4 Many alcohol drinking verbs have corresponding Agent's names derived from these verbs (more examples later).
group of men drinking together. It can be concluded that guzzling is considered as a "bad mannered" way of drinking beer or some soft drink greedily with haste, immoderately, often continuously, in large quantities with noisy swallowing.

The verb to guzzle can refer not only to the way and technique of drinking. In connection with the preposition away it achieves the meaning of consequences [Stanisławski 1969: 369].

(11) Jim has guzzled away all his money.

Roget's Thesaurus [1989:609] groups the verb to guzzle together with verbs denoting both the alcohol drinking action, and the result of this action (getting drunk). Therefore, to guzzle is connected with such verbs as; to fuddle, to sousé, to booze, to swig, to tipple, to tope etc.

2. ALCOHOL DRINKING VERBS

TO BOOZE

The verb to booze denotes heavy drinking, in other words, drinking in excess with the intention of getting (very) drunk or for fun, enjoyment, self-indulgence, and letting off tension. It is connected with having a good time with friends while drinking beer or some cheap wine, though spirits are also acceptable. To booze is recognized as a general verb of drinking in colloquial use among working class, but also it is still in current usage, especially among young people, both girls and boys. It is considered as being a low register verb, but the Speaker can express tolerance [Sne11-Hornby 1983] as long as the Agent is male. The Agent can be called "a boozer" when he is drinking too much.

(12) He was a consistent boozer.

Worth mentioning here is the term "a boozing broad" (Am.E.). It refers to a woman who drinks too much. This term has a pejorative connotation. A woman as an Agent can be also called "a boozing-bigot" which denotes prejudice.

"A boozer" can be the name of a drinking place.

(13) Let's go to the boozer.

5 Examples with no reference are quoted by the author.
There is also a place called "a booze - merchant" which is the place where cheap wine or beer is sold.

In many dictionaries to booze is recognized as synonymous with the verb to fuddle when denoting the effects of drinking.

(14) He's ill because he boozes all the time.

From the structural point of view the continuous form of to booze is more preferable.

(15) He's out boozing with his friends. [Longman 1983: 108
(16) The men spent the whole evening in the pub boozing up. [Courtney 1989: 44]

It is often nominalized (alcoholic drinks may be collectively referred to as "booze").

(17) Have you got enough booze for the party? [Fisia 1990: 64]
(18) Let's go for a booze up.
(19) Have a booze (up). [Hornby 1980: 95]
(20) Go on the booze. [Hornby 1990: 95]
(21) Boysie screwed up his eyes and the vision cleared. Too much booze. [Gardner 1968: 13]

TO TIPPLE

The verb to tipple (typically British) mainly refers to the habitual and rather secretive drinking of small quantities of spirits, sherry, or port, although some non-alcoholic drinks can be accepted, too.

(22) John's favourite tipple is coca-cola, mine is sherry. [Hornby 1980: 907]

The liquor is tippled quietly and slowly, with pleasure. It is associated typically with a female Agent, who as a female is tolerated and accepted by the Speaker [Snell-Hornby 1983]. The Agent may be also represented by a man who usually tippled alone and on his/her own. The usage of to tipple is more current but not common, and it is recognized as a high register verb.

Here are some more examples of to tipple (often nominalized):

(24) Can you tell me what she tippled every evening?
(25) She tippled martini quite regularly.
TO TOPE

To tope (typically British) is a verb ignored by many middle sized or bigger dictionaries being recognized as old-fashioned and not in general use. It means to drink hard or in excess and refers to habitual drinking of fairly large amounts of alcohol as wine or spirits. This verb does not seem to have a low register and refers to a more civilized way of being an alcoholic ("a toper").

(26) My grandfather was away toping on his own.
(27) She is a toper.

The Chamber's dictionary [Davidson 1935] makes it synonymous with the verb to tipple. As said in this dictionary to tope comes from the phrase to top off, and suggests drinking off at one draught.

(28) Peter drank off a whole litre of beer all at once. [Courtney 1989: 152]

Courtney gives many explanations concerning the meaning of to top off, which has nothing to do with alcohol drinking. The closest meaning refers to supplying a car with petrol.

(29) Does the car need topping off/up? [Courtney 1989: 681]

To top up, on the other hand, also denotes filling a drink for someone, not the action of drinking itself.

(30) Let me top up your drink, it's half gone. [Courtney 1989: 681]
(31) Do let me top you up. [Courtney 1989: 681]

TO QUAFF

Also interesting is the verb to quaff, which is recognized as a very old fashioned verb denoting, as said in dictionaries, deep drinking; drinking eagerly or heartily in large draughts or in one draught. It can be used, however, in reference to drinking small, frequent amounts of alcohol as wine, sherry, port, and brandy. To quaff may refer to a heavy drinking session, but that is not usual.

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6 The verb to drink and its many phrasal verbs of alcohol drinking require a more detailed description.
7 See dictionaries listed at the end of the paper.
To quaff is said to be artificial by many native speakers of English, who use it only with the intention of achieving an effect of humour.

To SWILL

Alcohol drinking is one of the meanings of the verb to swill, which is not pointed out in many dictionaries at all. They give a meaning connected with rinsing, washing, or semi-liquid food for pigs, and alcohol drinking is ignored [F i s i a k 1990], or just mentioned consisely, then short definition is usually given - "to drink greedily or in large quantities" [Guralnik 1982]. In spite of this, to swill is quite popular and in fairly current use, especially in slang. However, it need not refer to alcohol drinking.

The workmen were swilling tea when they ought to have been working. [H o r n b y 1980: 874]

In example (35) the disapproval or even the Speaker's anger with the Agent may be felt because of the Agent's being busy with drinking instead of working.

In reference to alcohol drinking, to swill often denotes habitual greedy drinking in big amounts with enjoyment.

They just sat in the pub swilling (beer) all night. [L o n g m a n 1989: 1069]

The manner of drinking is negatively evaluated by the Speaker and recognized as pejorative. The Agent ("a swiller") is usually a male drinking mostly beer in company or alone. He drinks heavily, noisily, disgustingly, and carelessly, usually spilling the drink. Vomiting is often the result of this way of drinking.

He swilled his beer in a disgusting manner.

It is not a coincidence to call this way of drinking swilling, which denotes a "piggish" way of consumption. This obviously derives from the association with liquid food for pigs (one of the meanings mentioned above). This way of drinking can be comparatively illustrated by the Polish equivalent example.

Pije/chia jak świnia.
(He drinks/swills like a pig.)
To swill may be used with the preposition down in the same sense.

(39) Peter is in the kitchen, swilling down the beer as usual. [Courtney 1989: 639]

(40) Swill down a few.

In Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary [1438] to swill when denoting drinking is treated as synonymous with to guzzle.

TO SWIG

The verb to swig denoting eager and deep drinking in big gulps is more easily found in dictionaries, and quite popular in informal use. Being universal it refers to both sexes. To swig is probably derived from the old Anglo-Saxon verb swelgan (to swallow) [Davidson 1935]. It is often recognized as having a neutral or low register and is often associated with pirate adventure stories.

(41) Long John Silver was swigging rum.

Swigging is often done for relaxation.

(42) A quick swig before your wedding calms down your nerves.

Quite often it denotes drinking by one short but large mouthful from a bottle:

(43) He took a swig from the flask. [Webster's 1989:1438]

(44) Are they still swigging (away) at that bottle? They'll soon be drunk! [Courtney 1989: 639]

To swig is often subject to nominalization (examples 42, 43), as in the following:

(45) He took a swig of beer. [Longman 1989: 1069]

(46) Give me a swig of whisky.

Swigging usually refers to drinking beer or rum in the company of others in a bar.

(47) He's in the bar swigging beer. [Fis iak 1990: 687]

(48) They just sat there swigging beer all night. [Longman 1989: 1069]

(49) Swig off a glass of rum. [Hornby 1990: 874]

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8 In this nominalized instance it need not refer to alcohol.
9 To swig (at) is often used in continuous tenses.
As presented in the examples above beer or rum is usually swigged, but strong liquors (e.g. whisky) are also acceptable—"calm down nerves" (see e.g. 42, 46).

Although the verb to swig mainly denotes alcohol drinking, it can be found as referring to non-alcohol drinking as well (especially in nominalized form).

(50) took a long swig at the tea. [G a r d n e r 1968: 107]

TO TOSS OFF

The phrasal verb to toss off is not very common. It is a verb of a high-middle register denoting one-off drinking of hard liquors (e.g. spirits) or beer. The Agent is mainly represented by men drinking in a company or alone at a meeting or a pub. When drinking a lot the Agent can be called "a toser" which is equivalent with "a toper" or "drunkard" [D a v i d s o n 1935]. Worth mentioning is Shakespeare's name for "a drunkard", which is "a toss pot", also quoted in the above dictionary.

The verb to toss, no matter which semantic field it belongs to, denotes some rapid or quick action, which also refers to the technique of drinking often in one swallow with a quick upward or backward movement of the head.

(51) Shall we toss off a night-cap?
(52) Jack tossed off several pints of beer in quick succession. [L o n g m a n 1989: 1122]
(53) I think he's still in there tossing off the rest of the beer. [C o u r t n e y 1989: 683]
(54) He generally tosses off a cocktail or two before dinner. [W e b s t e r ' s 1989: 1497]

The phrasal verb to toss back is similar in meaning and denotes drinking a lot.

(55) They have been tossing back this evening. [C o u r t n e y 1989: 682]

Instead of tossing off, the expression shot-drinking is in more common use nowadays and is often used to talk about somebody's experiences of drinking (In everyday use in America it appears in nominalized form).

(56) He was shot-drinking all night, but never got drunk.
TO CHUGALUG

To chugalug in reference to drinking usually cannot be found in dictionaries. The verb to chug is included only, and denotes making the muffled explosive sound or puffing as of an engine. To chugalug mainly denotes one long drink of beer.

(57) We can chugalug a pint of beer.

To chug may be used in the same sense, too.

(58) Chug your beer, hurry up!

3. VERBS DENOTING EFFECTS OF DRINKING

These are the verbs that clearly denote the result of alcohol drinking (the state of being drunk), regardless of the way of drinking.

TO SOUSE

The primary meaning of to souse refers to washing, making something wet, or preserving fish etc. On the other hand, this meaning evokes a strong association with large quantities of alcohol drunk and the result of alcohol drinking, that is the Agent's being drunk when soused with rum, beer etc. In describing the state of being drunk, the Past Participle form is mainly used.

(59) Peter can't work today, he is soused with rum.

(60) He was really soused.

To souse refers to men. The Agent may be called "a souser", when the Speaker wants to stress the Agent's being a drunkard. This is not the verb of current usage. It is said to be used by the older generation.

TO FUDDLE

The verb to fuddle (typically British) is usually associated with the habit of drinking, often to excess, and with being influenced by alcohol. It can be heard among fairly sophisticated people, and is recognized as a verb of high-middle register. It does not express the Speaker's negative evaluation. In contrast to the verb to souse, which denotes a rather strong intoxication, the verb to fuddle refers to the state of being slightly intoxicated or influenced by alcohol.
Don’t fuddle your head with wine, you must study for your exam.

Mark can’t concentrate, he has fuddled himself with gin.

Too much drink fuddled her up.

Don’t drink so much, otherwise you will fuddle yourself and won’t be able to work.

Tom shouldn’t drive, he is in a fuddled condition.

Too much strong drink will fuddle your brain. [Longman 1989: 419]

He looks funny, when he is in a fuddle.

As shown in the above examples, being fuddled is mainly connected with losing the ability to think clearly, getting stupefied, or confused, and with losing a predisposition for performing some activities.

In this instance the Agent is non-specific and can be a man or woman. A hard drinker may be "a fuddle-cap" [Davidson 1935]. The Agent is often called "a fuddler".

It should be noticed that the Agent is not necessarily the Experiencer of drinking and getting drunk. He/she can make someone get drunk, who is recognized as the Patient-Experiencer of getting drunk.

Don’t fuddle him with wine, he will be not able to stand up.

TO INTOXICATE

One more verb denoting the condition of being affected by alcohol is to intoxicate, which could be explained as to make drunk; to make stupid with alcoholic drink; to cause loss of self-control as the result of taking some alcohol; to get poisoned with alcohol. As drinking liquor effects the psychological state of the Experiencer, intoxicated could mean invigorated, excited or delighted as the result of drinking, which would also refer to the verb to fuddle. Intoxication denotes alcoholic poisoning in rather a formal register and refers to very formal situations, as police reports. Young people would not often use this verb. It might be used by old persons being stuffy or talking seriously about alcohol drinking and getting drunk or poisoned as a result.

See note 1.
Some examples of usage:

(69) If a man drinks too much whisky, he becomes intoxicated. [Hornby 1980: 447]

(70) He was fined for driving while intoxicated. [Longman 1989: 533]

The aforegoing are some remarks concerning the usage of a few selected verbs of alcohol drinking. Some verbs have been discussed in a more detailed way, others only in a few words. A fully detailed description cannot be done in this short paper. This paper was intended to be reflective and interesting to the reader, hence the selective use of the categories mentioned previously. Therefore, it does not present a fully systematic and categorized schedule.

There are many other verbs worth mentioning, and their complete enumeration is not possible because there are too many of them, and there are new ones appearing in use in every day life as a result of fashion changes. These are not obviously "caught" by dictionaries.

This paper could not be complete without saying a few words about phrases denoting alcohol drinking. The use of phrases is subject to changes in fashion. Many of them can be found in dictionaries, however, those which are in current use should be looked for in streets, pubs, and drinking sessions.

Here are some examples of phrases connected with drinking:

(71) to exercise one's right arm
(72) to drink one's head off
(73) to outdrink somebody
(74) to empty bottles
(75) to send it down the long red road (old fashioned)
(76) to get tipsy
(77) to get loaded
(78) to get smashed
(79) to get plastered
(80) soaken down a few ["Take Blues" by The Blues Brothers]
(81) to knock back a few
(82) to tank up
(83) to bend one's elbow
(84) to drink like a fish
(85) to drink to get tight (Br.)
(86) to drown one's sorrows
to go pub crawling [e.g. 81-87 from Kirkpatrick 1983: 609]

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


**DICTIONARIES**


Anna Gintowska

KILKA UWAG NA TEMAT ANGIELSKICH CZASOWNIKÓW
- OZNAČAJĄCYCH CZYNNOŚĆ PICTA ALKOHOLU


Wiele omawianych w danym artykule czasowników należy również do innych pól semantycznych, często nie mających nic wspólnego z piciem. W wielu wypadkach czynność picia jest znaczeniem drugorzędnym. Przedmiotem rozważań jest jednak tylko picie alkoholu. Przy porównaniu czasowników uwzględniono między innymi okoliczności i popularność użycia, sposób picia, rodzaj trunku - zależnie od stopnia ważności danych kategorii dystynkcyjnych.

Wiele słowników nie uwzględnia tego typu czasowników, lub omawia je bardzo pobieżnie. Ich użycie oraz użycie zwrotów związanych z piciem alkoholu jest bardzo dynamiczne. Wiele z nich "wypada z mody" powstają nowe stosowane na co dzień jeszcze nie wychwycone przez słowniki. Częściej występują w mowie. Jedynie kontakt z żywym językiem daje możliwość ich bieżącego poznania.