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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 ca-

tegies can be ignored. The experimental model of the conceptual analyses of verbs presented in another paper by the author (this volume¹) 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 tittle, to toss off, to swill, to swig, 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 female², 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.

¹ See A. G i n t o w t - D z i w i ł ł, *An Experimental Approach to the Conceptual Analyses of English Verbs of Eating and Drinking* (this volume).

² Agent is obviously recognized as Human in reference to all the verbs discussed in this paper.

- (1) She took another *sip*³ of her tea. [L o n g m a n 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. [G a r d n e r 1968: 180]
- (3) ...took a shallow spoonful of the liquid and *sipped*. [G a r d n e r 1968: 142]
- (4) With the last *sip* of brandy, Boysie realized that he was unmistakably contented. [G a r d n e r 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. [H o r n b y 1980: 801]
- (6) She couldn't study, so she would order coffee and *sip* it slowly. [K e e l 1984: 31]
- (7) She *sipped* her drink, forcing herself to go slowly. [K e e l 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. [L o n g m a n 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? [C o u r t n e y 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"⁴. The Agent is usually represented by a man, or a

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 [S t a n i s ł a w s k i 1969: 369].

(11) Jim has *guzzled away* all his money⁵.

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 souse*, *to booze*, *to swig*, *to tittle*, *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 (vary) 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 [S n e l l - H o r n b y 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 conotation. 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. [L o n g m a n 1983: 108]

(16) The men spent the whole evening in the pub *boozing up*.
[C o u r t n e y 1989: 44]

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

(17) Have you got enough *booze* for the party? [F i s i a k 1990: 64]

(18) Let's go for a *booze up*.

(19) Have a *booze (up)*. [H o r n b y 1980: 95]

(20) Go on *the booze*. [H o r n b y 1990: 95]

(21) Boysie screwed up his eyes and the vision cleared. Too much *booze*. [G a r d n e r 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.
[H o r n b y 1980: 907]

The liquor is *tiddled* 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 *tipples* 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):

(23) What's your favourite *tipple*? [L o n g m a n 1989: 1114]

(24) Can you tell me what she *tipples* every evening?

(25) She *tiddled* 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 [D a v i d s o n 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*⁶ a whole litre of beer all at once.
[C o u r t n e y 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*? [C o u r t n e y 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. [C o u r t n e y 1989: 681]

(31) Do let me *top you up*. [C o u r t n e y 1989: 681]

TO QUAFF

Also interesting is the verb *to quaff*, which is recognized as a very old fashioned verb denoting, as said in dictionaries⁷, 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.

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.

(32) *Quaff (off)* a glass of wine. [H o r n b y 1980: 684]

(33) He *quaffed* the remains of his beer.

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.

(34) *Quaff* pills.

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" [G u r a l n i k 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.

(35) 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.

(36) 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.

(37) 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.

(38) *Pije/chla* 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.
[C o u r t n e y 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) [D a v i d s o n 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 flask⁸. [W e b s t e r ' s 1989:1438]

(44) Are they still *swigging (away)* at that bottle⁹. They'll soon be drunk! [C o u r t n e y 1989: 639]

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

(45) He took a *swig of beer*. [L o n g m a n 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*. [F i s i a k 1990: 687]

(48) They just sat there *swigging beer* all night. [L o n g m a n 1989: 1069]

(49) *Swig off* a glass of rum. [H o r n b y 1990: 874]

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.* [Gardner 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 tosser" which is equivalent with "a toper" or "drunkard" [Davids on 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.
[Longman 1989: 1122]

(53) I think he's still in there *tossing off* the rest of the beer. [Courtney 1989: 683]

(54) He generally *tosses off* a cocktail or two before dinner.
[Webster'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. [Courtney 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.

- (61) Don't *fuddle* your head with wine, you must study for your exam.
- (62) Mark can't concentrate, he has *fuddled* himself with gin.
- (63) Too much drink *fuddled* her up.
- (64) Don't drink so much, otherwise you will *fuddle* yourself and won't be able to work.
- (65) Tom shouldn't drive, he is in a *fuddled* condition.
- (66) Too much strong drink will *fuddle* your brain. [L o n g m a n 1989: 419]
- (67) 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" [D a v i d s o n 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 drunk¹⁰.

- (68) 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.

¹⁰ See note 1.

Some examples of usage:

- (69) If a man drinks too much whisky, he becomes *intoxicated*.
[H o r n b y 1980: 447]
- (70) He was fined for driving while *intoxicated*. [L o n g m a n
1989: 533]

The foregoing 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

- (87) to go pub crawling [e.g. 81-87 from Kirkpatrick 1983: 609]

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KILKA UWAG NA TEMAT ANGIELSKICH CZASOWNIKÓW - OZNACZAJĄCYCH CZYNNOŚĆ PICIA ALKOHOLU

W języku angielskim jest wiele czasowników oznaczających czynność picia. Wśród nich można wyróżnić te, które dotyczą jedynie czynności picia alkoholu. Celem danej pracy jest omówienie i porównanie kilku wybranych czasowników tego rodzaju. Objętość pracy nie pozwala na wyczerpującą analizę, która musiałaby uwzględnić większą liczbę czasowników, jak również zwroty. Kilka takich zwrotów zostało podanych jako przykłady.

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 drugorzędym. 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 dystynktywnych.

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.