THE SEMANTIC FIELD OF THE WORD "TIME"

Corina Mihaela Geană

Assist., PhD, University of Craiova

*Abstract: Our research aims at focusing on the word **time** and its semantic field. Either we speak of the British English or the other Anglophone countries – the United States, Australia, New Zealand or Canada – we can say that this word is widely used, not only in its original form but also in different combinations of words: verbal collocations, various derivatives or compounds, idiomatic expressions and proverbs.*

Keywords: idiom, phraseology, derivation, compounding, paremiology.

The semantic field of the word *time*, just like any other semantic field, represents a relatively open class, compiled by linguistic researchers and enriched by general speakers.

Regarding the etymology of this word, it comes from the Old English word *tima*, meaning *limited space of time*, from Proto-Germanic timon, meaning *time*. The abstract sense of *time* as *an indefinite continuous duration* is recorded from late 14th century. It was personified as an aged bald man carrying a scythe and an hour-glass. Extended senses, such as *occasion, the right time, leisure* or *times* (meaning *multiplied by*) developed in Old and Middle English[1].

In this article we will focus on the semantic field of the word *time*, by the medium of different expressions, phrases, verbal collocations, derivatives or compounds, idioms, slang expressions and proverbs.

The phraseological expressions' domain is one of the most comprehensive of all linguistic

domains. Thus, the word *time*, as well as its plural form *times*,can be found in numerous expressions, among which we can mention:

- *a bit at a time* = little by little; step by step;

[1] *Taken from The Online Etymology Dictionary: www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=time*

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- *abreast of / with the times* = up-to-date;
- *any time now* = at a moment's notice;
- *(at) any time (you like) / at what time so ever* = any minute; whenever you want;
- *as time go* = nowadays;
- *at a time* = at once;
- *at no time* = under no circumstances; on no account;
- *at one's time of life* = at one's age;
- *at the time of* = in the days of;
- *at the time when* = in the days when;
- *at this time of day* (familiar speech) = at present; nowadays;
- *at times / from time to time* = sometimes; now and then;
- *before one's time / before the times* = ahead of schedule;
- *between times* = now and then;
- *first last and all the time* = once and for all;
- *for a / some time* = for a / some while;
- *for the time being* = at present;
- *from that time (forth)* = ever since; after that;
- *from this time forth / onwards* = from now on;
- *his time has come* = his last hour has arrived;
- *in due time* = beforehand; previously;
- *in former times / in times past / in times gone by* = formerly;
- *in good time / by times* (archaic expression) = early;
- *in no time* = in a crack; in a split second;
- *in the course of time / by/in length of time* = gradually; eventually;
- *in the day time* = by day; during the day;
- *in the womb of time* = sooner or later;
- *in times to come* = in the future; from now on;
- *like the last of pea time* (familiar speech) = weighed down with age;
- *living up to the times* = rising to the occasion;
- *never to the end of time* = as long as the earth will last;
- *nine times out of ten* = usually; as a general rule;
- *now is the time* = now is the decisive moment; it's now or never;

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- *once in a lifetime* = just for once;
- *once upon a time* = there was;
- *other times, other manners* = other days, other ways; there are different ways of behavior in different epochs;
- *several times* = more than once; repeatedly;
- *slack time* = dead / slack season;
- *spare time* = leisure;
- *the dead time of night* = midnight;
- *there is time enough for that* = there's no hurry;
- *the time is out of joint* = the world has turned upside down;
- *the time is up* = the term has expired;
- *the time of day* = the present time;
- *time and again / many a time / many times* = often; frequently;
- *time is everything* = if you have enough time, you have everything;
- *to the end of time / against time* = for ever; to all eternity; endlessly;
- *what time are you?* (familiar speech) = what time is it?
- *within a short time* = very soon.

The word *money* can also be found in various verbal collocations,among which we can

mention the following:

- *to be behind one's time* = to be late (for something);
- *to be in bad time for something* = to not feel like doing something;
- *to be knocked out of time* = to be struck dumb;
- *to be on time* = to be punctual;
- *to bid / to give / to pass somebody the time of day* = to greet somebody;
- *to bide one's time* = to wait;
- *to change one's time* = to sing a different tune;
- *to have a (jolly) time of it / to have a hell of a time / to have no end of a time / to have a roaring / topping time* (familiar speech) = to have a lot of fun;
- *to have a killing time* (familiar speech) = to break one's back; to tire oneself out;

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- *to have a terrible time of it / to have a bad / rough time of it* = to suffer;
- *to have a thin time of it* = to endure a lot of misfortunes;
- *to have heaps of time* (familiar speech) = to be available all the time;
- *to have many demands on one's time* = to have a lot of work to do;
- *to idle one's time away* (familiar speech) = to be a worthless fellow; to be good for nothing; to slacken off;
- *to keep / to beat time* (in music) = to finger;
- *to laze (away) one's time* = to spend one's time in laziness;
- *to loaf away the time* (familiar speech) = to waste time;
- *to pass away the time / as a pastime* = for an amusement;
- *to pass the time of day with somebody* (familiar speech) = to exchange some formulas of politeness with somebody;
- *to show the time* = to tell what time is;
- *to slacken the time* (in music) = to slow down the tact;
- *to smell powder for the first time* (familiar speech: military term) = to receive the baptism of fire;
- *to spend a happy time* = to have a great time;
- *to stay beyond one's time* = to stay too much in one place;
- *to take time by the forelock* = to get the opportunity;
- *to take up all somebody's time* = to absorb all somebody's attention;
- *to time / to appoint the time* = to fix the moment; to fix the time;
- *to time to / with* = to synchronize with;
- *to walk against time* = to go at a swift pace.

The derivative words based on the word *time* are less numerous:

- *mistimed* (negative prefix *mis-* + adjectival suffix *–ed*) = inconvenient; inappropriate;
- *timed* (adjectival suffix *–ed*) = synchronized;
- *timeless* (adjectival suffix *–less*) = endless; inconvenient; inappropriate; atemporal;
- *timely* (adjectival suffix *–ly*) = current; present-day; topical;

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- *timer* (noun suffix *–er*) = electronic watch; time clerk; synchronizer.

This word can also be found in the expression *an old timer* = a person who has gone through some hard times;

- *timing* = coordination; time synchronizing;
- *untimeliness* (negative prefix *un-* + adjectival suffix *–ly* + noun suffix *–ness*) = unseasonableness; earliness;
- *untimely* (negative prefix *un-* + adjectival suffix *–ly*) = premature; unseasonable;

As far as compound words are concerned, *time* can be found in the following expressions:

- *all –time* = incomparable; amazing; unsurpassed;
- *down-time* = dead time; idle period;
- *ill-timed* = at the wrong moment, inopportune; unseasonable;
- *ill-timedly* = unseasonably;
- *in the night-time* = during the night;
- *long-time* = long-term; indefinitely;
- *part-time* = half time; short time;
- *sometime* = at one time; some day; once;
- *time-consuming / time-taking* = which requires much time;
- *time-honoured* = centennial; conventional; venerable;
- *time-out* = break; repose;
- *time-serving* = uncomplainingness; hypocritical; insincere;
- *timetable* = time book;
- *well-timed* = at the right moment.

Either we talk about idiomatic expressions (phrases with a literal meaning which, in time,

have started to be used in a figurative or an idiomatic way) or slang (the euphemistic language, which is an informal language domain, with a strong emotional impact, used by certain categories of people), the English language has always provided a wide range of idioms. Here are some examples of idiomatic combinations of words based on the words *time / times*, either we refer to the British English or to the other Anglophone countries who speak English as their first language: the American English, the English spoken in Jamaica or Africa, Australian English etc.:

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- *a good-time girl* = a girl who lives for pleasure;
- *all-time favourite* (slang, American English) = 1. (noun) – a person or a thing that has been popular for a long time; 2. (adjective) – a thing which has been popular for a long time;
- *a question / matter of time* = sooner or later;
- *a time-lag* = the interval between a cause and its effect;
- *bean time* (slang, American English) = dinner time;
- *behind the times* = out of date in one's ideas;
- *big time* (slang, American English) = 1. (noun) – a roaring success; 2. (noun) – heroine; 3. (adjective) – mean; perfidious; desperate;
- *big-time operator* (slang, American English) = 1. (noun) – a great businessman; 2. (noun) – a lecher; a philanderer;
- *big-time spender* (slang, American English) = squanderer; spendthrift;
- *chucking-out time* (slang, British English) = closing time in restaurants;
- *devil of a time / devil's own time* (slang, American English) = a difficult, rough period of time;
- *double time* = twice the normal rate of pay;
- *for the sake of old times / for old times' sake* = in memory of the past;
- *game time* (slang, American English) = the very moment when one takes action;
- *good-time Charley* (slang, American English) = an optimistic, self-confident person;
- *good-time it* (slang, American English) = to have a good time, to enjoy oneself;
- *good-time man* (slang, American English) = a drug seller;
- *happy as a boxing kangaroo in fog time* (slang, Australian English) = extremely unhappy; very bored;
- *hard time* (slang, American English) = 1. a difficult experience; 2. imprisonment;

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- *high old time* (slang, American English) = enjoyable moments; party
- *high time* = the time has come when delay is no longer possible;
- *how time drags / flies!* = How slowly the time passes!
- *in the fullness of time* = in the end; at the right moment;
- *in the nick of time* = precisely on time; at the very last moment;
- *long time no see* (slang, American English) = I haven't seen you for ages;
- *rack time* (slang, American English; military term) = a time which is spent in bed;
- *rare old time* (slang, American English) = a period of time when one has enjoyed oneself very much (for instance, at a party);
- *sack time* (slang, American English) = 1. a time which is spent in bed; 2. bedtime;
- *short time* (slang, British English) = a time spent in the company of a prostitute;
- *short-timer* = 1. (slang, American English) = a soldier who is at the end of his military service; 2. (slang, British English) = a client of a prostitute; 3. (slang, British English) = someone who rents a room in a hotel for sexual purposes;
- *small-time* (adjective; slang, American English) = insignificant; small;
- *there's a time and place for everything* = a good thing can be spoilt by bad timing or an unsuitable setting;
- *time and again / time after time / time out of number / time(s) without number* = more than once; repeatedly. The last phrase is often used to express impatience or annoyance: *I have told you time without number not to forget to lock the door.*
- *time bomb* (slang, British English) = a procedure meant to activate a computer programme by using the computer clock by someone who commits a computerized fraud;
- *time-consuming* = requiring a great deal of time;

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- *time is getting on / time is running out* = it is getting late; there is little time left;
- *time is of the essence* = time is the most important consideration;
- *time (out)!* (slang, American English) = Shut up a little!
- *time out of mind / time immemorial / in the mists of time* = from ancient times; in times of old;
- *time's a wasting* (slang, American English) = move on, because it is late;
- *time to cruise* (slang, American English) = it's time to leave;
- *to be born before / ahead of one's time* = to have ideas or invent things before people are ready to appreciate them;
- *to be pushed / pressed for time* = to have no time to spare;
- *to bide one's time* = to wait for the right moment to carry out a plan;
- *to buy time* (slang, American English) = to win time; to postpone;
- *to do something against time* = to get a task finished within a given time;
- *to do time* = to serve a prison sentence;
- *to have a terrible time of it / to have a bad / rough time of it* (familiar speech) = to experience difficulties, problems, etc.;
- *to have no time for* = to disapprove strongly of;
- *to have the time of one's life* (familiar speech) = to enjoy oneself; to be very excited;
- *to have time on one's hands* = to be in plenty of time; to have nothing to do;
- *to kill (the) time* = to do anything so as to pass the time and avoid getting bored;
- *to know the time of day* (slang, British English) = to know exactly the state of things;
- *to live on borrowed time* = to regard each and every year as not one's own but for temporary use only;
- *to make time* = to make sure one has enough time; (slang, American English) = to flirt; to pay court to somebody;

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- *to make up the time* = to do something at a different time, as you cannot do it at the correct time;
- *to march / move / keep up with the times* = to keep one's attitudes up-to-date;
- *to mark time* = to delay taking action until everyone else is ready. This expression originates in the military command "*Mark time!*" = to stamp the feet on the same spot without advancing;
- *to play for time* = to try to delay some action in the hope that conditions will meanwhile improve; to gain time;
- *to serve one's time* = to do one's military service;
- *to take one's time* = to go slow (about something);
- *to take time off* = to absent oneself from work, often for a particular reason;
- *two-time loser* (slang, American English) = incorrigible loser;
- *uptime* (slang, American English) = a computer's processing time.

As regards paremiology, the word *time* can be found in various sayings, which will not

only help us to become better at forming good English sentences based on this word, but they will also enable us to understand and appreciate *time* more wisely. Here are some examples:

- *A mouse in time may bite a cable in two* = a thing which is done just in time is more useful;
- *An inch of gold will not buy an inch of time* = time is precious, one cannot buy time with money;
- *A stitch in time saves nine / Procrastination is the thief of time* = a timely effort will prevent more work later;
- *Everything comes in time to him who can't wait / With time and patience the leaf of the mulberry becomes satin* = Patience brings everything about;
- *Experience is the daughter of time* = one learns as long as one lives;
- *Life is short and time is swift* = one should enjoy life as much as possible, as it does not last very long;
- *Lost time is never found again* (a Benjamin Franklin's quote) / *Time and tide wait for no man* = time passing is inevitable;

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- *There is a time to speak and a time to be silent* = this saying originates in the Bible (Ecclesiastes 3) and it implies that one should know when to say something and when to say nothing;
- *There's no time like the present* = the best time to do something is now;
- *There's no time to lose / There's no time to be lost* = you must act quickly;
- *Time (alone) will tell / Only time will tell* = this saying is used when one has to wait for some time to find out the result of a situation;
- *Time and straw make medlars ripe* (an old saying used in *Don Quixote*) / *Patience and time make all things chime* = if one is patient, one can accomplish great things;
- *Time flies* = this saying originates in the Latin phrase *tempus fugit* and it implies that time seems to pass very quickly;
- *Time heals all wounds* = with time, things get better;
- *Time is money* = this saying was first used by the American politician Benjamin Franklin in 1748 and it implies that time is valuable and should not be wasted;
- *Truth is the daughter of time* = this saying comes from Francis Bacon's quote: *Truth is the daughter of time, not of authority* and it implies that the true nature of a thing becomes clear over time.

To conclude, we can say that the semantic field of the word *time* is perhaps one of the most

comprehensive of all the semantic fields in English, since this word is maybe the most important resource we all dispose of. *Time* was, is and will be man's constant preoccupation, either we speak about saving time or about its "investment" in different useful everyday activities.

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