DEFINING THE ENTRY UNIT IN A DICTIONARY OF NON-STANDARD PROFESSIONAL VOCABULARY

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1. Introduction

The overarching objective of professional communication is the transfer of specialised knowledge. In the majority of fields and disciplines such communication takes the form of verbal interaction\(^1\), with the language for special purposes (LSP) used to achieve the communicative goal. However, LSPs are not homogeneous linguistic phenomena and their variability manifests themselves on both the horizontal and the vertical axes. The horizontal axis reflects the multitude of, and in some cases the interdependence/overlapping between, specialised languages developed as a result of professional activity, while the vertical axis reveals the heterogeneity of individual LSPs on the basis of selected conceptual, linguistic and pragmatic parameters. One of such parameters can be register, which can be defined as “[a] variety of a language or a level of usage, as determined by the degree of formality and choice of vocabulary, pronunciation, and syntax, according to the communicative purpose, social context, and standing of the user” [Oxford Dictionaries Online]\(^2\). Accordingly, register as a variable binds together the extralinguistic reality with the language realisation of the information transfer. Therefore,

\(^1\) As opposed to non-verbal communication with the use of mathematic formulae, symbols, pictograms, etc., or communication with a machine.

\(^2\) For some scholars ‘register’ is a synonym of (1) ‘style’ or (2) “a speech variety used by a particular group of people, usually sharing the same occupation (e.g. doctors, lawyers) or the same interests (e.g. stamp collectors, baseball fans)” [Richards et al. 1996: 312-313]. In fact, the definition as presented in (2) seems to largely overlap with the definition of an LSP, and therefore, on account of its limited scope, has not been adopted in this paper.
any comprehensive study/description of a specialised language or an LSP-oriented practical activity, such as preparation of reference materials, need to take account of all register-influenced facets of professional communication.

The degree of formality of professional communication is indeed highly influenced by the ‘social context’, which basically relates to the various aspects of work culture within a discourse community. These include the kind of the subject-matter studied/dealt with, the working conditions (freelance/actual workplace/teleworking, etc.), institutional setting, adopted communication code, interpersonal relations (including hierarchies), etc. From the linguistic perspective, it needs to be emphasised that the conscious choice of language means made by participants of professional communication is aimed at maximising the efficiency of specialised knowledge transfer in a given communicative situation. Accordingly, all language means, including those considered informal, non-standard or “belonging to the lower stylistic level, such a professional jargon and occupational slang” [Gläser 2000: 86], need to be acknowledged as equally important. This contradicts the formal approach to specialised languages, and terminology in particular, as advocated by Eugene Wüster and the Vienna school of terminology [Felber, Budin 1994]. Probably, the strong influence of Wüsterian approach is one of the reasons why there have been only a few systematic studies of informal professional communication. Suchodolska notices in her research that little place has been devoted to professional groups and their in-group lexis in Polish, Russian or English linguistics [Suchodolska 2014: 61]. The other cause might be scarcity of primary language resources, including specialised corpora (written and spoken) and the difficulty in obtaining reliable data by other means. Undoubtedly, studies into non-standard layer of professional communication of most LSPs are the missing part of the comprehensive picture of national LSP macrosystems, including the Polish and English ones.3

The need for quality reference materials becomes even more imperative in the context of the recent stronger focus of the Polish Ministry of Education on the reintroduction of vocational training to the national educational system. The school year of 2014/2015 was announced ‘the Year of Professionals’ by the Ministry, the aim being to foster vocational schooling system and remove the stigma of trade/vocational schools being a ‘worse’ choice in post-secondary education. One of the elements of the full vocational training path is obligatory foreign professional language training.4 However, while the introduction of the new core curriculum was swift, there were almost no educational materials (textbooks, workbooks, reference works such as learners’ specialised dictionaries) available to language teachers at the time, and the market has been slow to adapt to the new situation [Pławska 2016: 7].

One of the resources with the greatest potential of bridging the gap between authentic informal professional communication and the parties interested in such

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3 Sociolinguistic studies regarding professional communication seem to be generally rare. Fox, Fertleman, Cahill and Palmer in their paper concerned with medical slang emphasise that despite growing vocabulary stock, the use of medical slang “remains mostly undocumented and overlooked by mainstream medical literature” [Fox et al. 2003: 174].

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communication (trainees/students, (socio)linguists, authors of educational materials, LSP teachers, translators, etc.) is a dictionary of non-standard professional vocabulary. A need for a parallel bilingual reference work of that kind becomes even more important in multilingual environments (e.g. multinational companies). In such cases the vocabulary stock can be sourced from several languages [Grabias 2001: 235], leading to the emergence of a specific in-group lexis, usually incomprehensible to the outsider. It is claimed that a dictionary could considerably enhance professional communication within a discourse community, especially between newcomers and the experienced colleagues, and could decrease the time needed for full inclusion in a professional community. It might also become an invaluable source of sociolinguistic information. In particular, when set beside a corpus of informal professional texts, the dictionary can be deemed highly structured, compact, focussed on the rare and unusual and presenting bilingual data in a manner familiar to the user.

There is no denying the fact that in light of the dictionary functions as outlined above, i.e. becoming a tool in enhancing in-group professional communication and a source for the authors of LSP educational materials as well as sociolinguistic research, the work should be viewed as a maximising dictionary, i.e. one that registers a relatively complete array of language phenomena occurring in informal professional communication. Obviously, tailoring the dictionary to specific users’ needs will influence the content of the work and its composition. Undoubtedly, a bilingual dictionary of non-standard professional vocabulary will in some important aspects differ from a traditional bilingual (terminological) dictionary and a terminological, both methodologically and structurally, but some fundamental decisions need to be taken, including the degree to which the dictionary should reflect the social stratification of an LSP [Gläser 2000: 87]. This in turn entails the fundamental problem of delineating various types of professional vocabulary, including informal or non-standard units, which is of utmost importance during the extraction process, lemma list creation and proper labelling of individual entries.

This paper aims to discuss the issues connected with the definition and identification of linguistic units that are supposed to become headwords in a dictionary of non-standard professional vocabulary. First, the idea of non-standard professional vocabulary will be derived against the background of traditional and modern approach to terminology. The following section will focus on the definition of the basic notions connected with the ‘social varieties’ of lexis, the aim being to distil the characteristics of such units to be used as parameters for the extraction non-standard professional vocabulary. Finally, the definition and features of such vocabulary are presented and elaborated on in light of the proposed lexicographic project.

2. Standard and non-standard professional vocabulary

The major linguistic content-carrying unit in professional communication is the specialised word. However, special vocabulary comes in a variety of flavours, and its type is dependent on the nature of the object which the specialised word represents (theoretical term vs. empirical term/nomen), its characteristics (onomasiological types
of terms)⁵ and the degree of formality in communication (formal vs. informal vocabulary), among other variables. The traditional view holds that terms proper are the major and the most precise units of professional knowledge transfer. In this view, terms are signs of concepts, i.e. words or combinations of words that have been permanently assigned to respective concepts [Felber & Budin 1994: 26]. This term-concept assignment is an effect of a deliberate activity of a competent terminological body/authority, and gives rise to standardised terminology. From this perspective, the term proper is a standard preferred knowledge-carrying unit, as opposed to all other non-standard(ised) units present in specialised texts, such as pre-terms (units yet to become terms), terminological synonyms, idiolect-based terminology, etc. In formal languages, such as those used in information thesauruses, the former belongs to the class of descriptors, that is units that represent (or are allowed to represent) the concept and are accompanied by a definition and/or a set of semantic relations, while some of the latter become ascriptors, or non-preferred/forgotten terms, whose only function in the thesaurus is to direct the user to the corresponding descriptor [see Bielicka 1988: 12; Tomasik-Beck 1977: 7]. Similarly, terminological dictionaries, as the name suggests, should include only standardised terminological units⁶, and per se are prescriptive.

However, the standardisation of terms in a particular field will always depend on the popularity of that field [Korzybski 1984: 16], and still language users need to reach agreement regarding usage of given terms in a specific context [Sager 1990: 114]. Moreover, in line with a more recent approach to terminology, the so-called sociocognitive approach [Temmerman 2000], Tsakona provides the answer to the question of what should in fact be considered a standardised term. The researcher claims that standardisation as understood by the Vienna School is unrealistic. Accordingly, standardisation is “meant not as a deliberate process of coining, collecting, or introducing terminology, but in a more general sense, as a result, and more specifically as a sociolinguistic phenomenon: a standardised term is one which is well-known is a speech community, is often used in specialised publications or the media, and is also accepted by the speakers [...]” [Tsakona 2007: 137, emphases mine – M.Ł.]. Despite the subjective, evaluative and possibly non-quantifiable nature of at least two of the three prerequisites (i.e. knowledge of a term by a speech community and acceptance by the speakers), it seems justifiable to adopt the attributes cited above as a guide to differentiating between specialised vocabulary: failure to meet one of the conditions listed will result in rendering a given word or phrase as a candidate for a non-standard specialised/professional vocabulary unit. Methodologically speaking, two complementary method techniques can be used to select non-standard vocabulary candidates: a corpus study and a questionnaire.

The author’s own corpus-based comparative study of English specialised vocabulary related to electronics has revealed that simple quantitative methods are a good measure for determining non-standard specialised/professional vocabulary, such as professional slang or colloquialism: such units are virtually non-existent in ‘standard’ specialised

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⁵ See, inter alia, Lukszyn and Zmarzer [2001/2006: 29-37].
⁶ In this paper I use the term ‘terminological dictionary’ and ‘specialised/ LSP dictionary’ interchangeably, unless specified otherwise.
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This preliminary analysis has also revealed that such units rank low on frequency lists, which is a useful hint for the parameters of the extraction procedure.

As regards the ‘soft’ non-quantifiable data, a questionnaire technique is warranted, with field specialists (= discourse community members) acting as informants. Wilkoń, among other scholars, claims that a questionnaire is an important method for obtaining sociolinguistic data [Wilkoń 2000: 9]. However, specific characteristics of a professional group (e.g. strong group identity and elitism) can in fact render the methodology unreliable or unworkable. For example, Suchodolska – who ventured to study the in-group vocabulary of medical professionals (cardiologists and cardiac surgeons) in Poland – claims that on account of the reasons mentioned above it was extremely difficult for her to carry out the studies among professionals, with the response rate of only 12.5% [Suchodolska 2014: 61].

3. Argot, jargon, slang and colloquialism

Since titles of dictionaries of non-standard vocabulary refer to the units they describe using various terms, it appears necessary to define the fundamental sociolinguistic notions used by the authors, such as argot, slang, jargon, and colloquialism, in order to be able to use appropriate sociolinguistic terminology in relation to specific phenomena, define the non-standard professional vocabulary unit and extract its most salient characteristics.

According to Oxford Dictionaries argot is “the jargon or slang of a particular group or class”, while jargon is “[s]pecial words or expressions used by a profession or group that are difficult for others to understand: ‘legal jargon’”. The Dictionary defines slang as “[a] type of language consisting of words and phrases that are regarded as very informal, are more common in speech than writing, and are typically restricted to a particular context or group of people”. Seemingly, colloquialism stands between slang (very informal) and jargon, as it is defined as “[a] word or phrase that is not formal or literary and is used in ordinary or familiar conversation” [Oxford Dictionaries Online]. These definitions reflect the most prevalent understanding of the notions as shared by most English speakers (non-linguists). In particular, where specialised vocabulary is considered, jargon is equated with terminology, and slang along with colloquialism constitutes the informal (unofficial) layer of the lexicon. However, the definition of the notions is far from settled. The Collins English Dictionary, while taking a note of the most popular meaning of jargon, i.e. that of a “1. specialized language concerned with a particular subject, culture, or profession”, also points to the more technical (metalin-
linguistic) meaning, i.e. that of “2. a language characterized by pretentious syntax, vocabulary, or meaning”, before providing two other meanings of “3. gibberish” and “4. another word for pidgin” [Collins English Dictionary Online]. The definitions of slang and colloquialism, as presented in the Collins English Dictionary are to a considerable degree congruent with their meanings presented by the former dictionary⁹. Argot as a term is currently rather rarely used¹⁰.

Moreover, the definitions of the terms in question have evolved for the last few decades. According to Collins English Dictionary argot was formerly defined as the slang or jargon of a particular group, especially a group of thieves. The negative connotations of argot [Polish argot] and jargon [Polish żargon] are present in the Dictionary of the Polish Language (1958-1969), edited by Doroszewski, possibly because the dictionary had been designed as a prescriptive and normative work and sociolects had been viewed as substandard. Simultaneously, the entry slang [Polish slang] redirects to the Polish term wiech, defined as “an informal, unconventional variety of language, characterised by expressiveness, and not subject to the strict norms of the literary language” [SJPD online, translation mine – M.Ł.]. Kania also observes the negative connotations that the terms argot and jargon used to evoke, however the researcher also notes that the terminology pertaining to the social variations of languages in neither codified nor unified, and the terms (including slang, wiech, and gwara środowiskowo-zawodowa =language of a social/professional group) are sometimes used interchangeably [Kania 1995: 7-8]. Admittedly, definitions of the terms argot, jargon and slang, included in the online PWN Dictionary of Polish Language, substantiate the claim [PWN Dictionary Online]¹¹.

It seems that some specialised reference works do not provide clear disambiguation of the notions either. Strangely enough, argot is missing from The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics [Richards et al. 1996], while slang, jargon and colloquialism are defined as follows:

**slang:** casual, very informal speech, using expressive but informal words and expressions (slang words/expressions). For some people, slang is equivalent to colloquial speech but for others, it means ‘undesirable speech’. Usually ‘colloquial speech’ refers to a speech variety used in informal situations with colleagues, friends or relatives, and ‘slang’ is used for a very informal speech variety which often serves as ‘in-group’ language for a particular set of people such as teenagers, army recruits, pop-groups etc. Most slang is rather unstable as its

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⁹ Slang: 1. a. vocabulary, idiom, etc, that is not appropriate to the standard form of a language or to formal contexts, may be restricted as to social status or distribution, and is characteristically more metaphorical and transitory than standard language; b. (as modifier) ⇒ a slang word; 2. another word for jargon.; 3. verb to abuse (someone) with vituperative language; insult. Colloquialism: 1. a word or phrase appropriate to conversation and other informal situations; 2. the use of colloquial words and phrases [Collins English Dictionary Online].

¹⁰ Argot (32 hits) is many times less frequently used than slang (162 hits) or jargon (432 hits) in the ACADeMIC section of the Corpus of Contemporary American English. [see COCA Online].

¹¹ In fact, the three terms are treated as synonyms, with only slight differences across the definitions: argot: a variety of language used by a professional or social group; slang: an informal variety of language used by a professional or social group; jargon: a social variety of language [sjp.pwn.pl, translation mine – M.Ł.].
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words and expressions change quite rapidly [...]. See also JARGON. [Richards et al. 1996: 337, original emphasis].

**jargon**: speech or writing used by a group of people who belong to a particular trade, profession, or any other group bound together by mutual interest, e.g. *the jargon of law, medical jargon.* [...][Richards et al. 1996: 193, original emphasis].

**colloquialism**: a word or phrase that is more commonly used in informal speech and writing. For example, *boss* is a colloquialisms for *employer*. See also COLLOQUIAL SPEECH. [Richards et al. 1996: 63, original emphasis].

**colloquial speech** also informal speech: the type of speech used in everyday, informal situations when the speaker is not paying particular attention to pronunciation, choice of words, or sentence structure. Colloquial speech is not necessarily non-prestige speech and should not be considered SUBSTANDARD. Educated native speakers of a language normally use colloquial speech in informal situations with friends, fellow workers, and members of family [Richards et al. 1996: 63, original emphasis].

As can be seen from the definitions, there is a considerable degree of overlapping between the notions presented in the specialised work and in popular dictionaries, yet the specialised dictionary focuses more on the qualities of the notions in question. Other scholars also equate the notions or point to their slight differences, one example being Atkins and Rundell, who state that “slang is further down the informality scale than jargon” [Atkins, Rundell 2008: 186].

A comprehensive view on social stratification of languages comes from Grabias [Grabias 1994; Grabias 2001]. The scholar suggests that a generalised term *sociolect* should be used to account for the entirety of socially-conditioned language varieties [Grabias 2001: 235]. In particular, the author emphasises that sociolects “are varieties of a national language connected with the existence of stable social groups, joined by some kind of relationship. The varieties are termed as group languages, professional languages, group dialects, slang, jargon, etc. The author adds that the terms are commonly understood as being synonymous, although in linguistics they are frequently differentiated [Grabias 2001: 235-236].

According to Grabias [2001: 250] sociolects exist in two major functional varieties:

1. sociolects with a primary professional-communicative function, among which one can discriminate between (a) professional languages – overt varieties in which the choice of language means is subordinated to the efficient and precise transmission of thoughts; (b) jargons – intentionally covert varieties of language, in which the choice of language means is subordinated to such encoding of information that it becomes available (comprehensible) to selected users;

2. sociolects with a primary expressive function, among which it is possible to differentiate between: (a) slang – an intentionally overt language variety, in which the choice of language means is subordinated to the expressive function; (b) playful varieties of language, e.g. the so-called secret language of children.

Grabias’s proposal is by far the most comprehensive, however to become universal it needs to be widely adopted and shared by other scholars [cf. Ramiączek 2007: 120-121]. Piekot, for example, claims that Grabias’s proposal might require some minor revision [Piekot 2008: 25-28].
Practically speaking, the lack of consent (and unification, if feasible at all) of the meaning of fundamental sociolinguistic terms might hinder lexicographic efforts to correctly assign appropriate value (and hence required parameters of the medio- and microstructure and pragmatic labelling) to non-standard units included in the dictionary. Some lexicographers seem to be aware of the problem of the fluidity of, and difficulty in delineating, a boundary between, slang, idiom and colloquialism and express their concern openly [Kozierkiewicz 2010: 5-6].

4. Non-standard professional vocabulary

(i)

As has already been indicated (see Section 2), professional vocabulary comes in several varieties. One dichotomy is of specific importance here, namely that of the origin of the vocabulary, with terminology proper created in an artificial manner, and professionalisms entering a specialised language in a natural way, first appearing in a discourse between members of a professional community [Kania 1995: 9]. Despite his obsolete view on the creation of terminology proper [see considerations in Section 2 above], the author rightly notices the ‘natural’ repository of specialised vocabulary. Kania further emphasises that there are some convergence points between artificially-created terminology and naturally-appearing professional lexis, however, the former is characterised by greater stability, standardisation, high precision, lack of geographical variations or emotional connotations, and is mostly used in the formal (official) style [Kania 1995: 10]. By contrast, professionalisms exhibit less stability, lack of standardisation, existence of possible geographical variations (which can be considered synonymous relative to each other and their standardised kin), might carry an emotional load and will be used in an informal (unofficial) style. In fact, such units share a lot of features with slang [cf. Widawski 2000: IX]. The dichotomy and the discussion above is of utmost importance here as it reveals the features of the informal units of professional vocabulary.

According to Kozierkiewicz, professional slang is “the language characteristic of a specific professional group or profession, and based on an independent set of words. Slang often features a deliberate distortion of the typical meaning of a word. Contrary to some views, slang is not necessarily used only in the negative meaning. Nonetheless it is true that slang often involves change of meaning we are used to, which sometimes results in misunderstanding of the word in a given context and to funny and unexpected situations” [Kozierkiewicz 2010: 5-6].

The following excerpt illustrates the problem well. Kozierkiewicz in the introduction to his dictionary writes that “the field of finances is rich in slang expressions, among which one can come across both financial jargon and financial slang”. Moreover, “within financial slang it is possible to differentiate the jargon of accounting, taxes, banking and stock market”. [Kozierkiewicz 2010: 6, translation mine – M.L.]

However, according to Grabias, professional vocabulary units that are imprecise or metaphorical cannot be regarded as professionalisms [Grabias 1994: 132]. Unfortunately, this might be yet another example of lack unification of sociolinguistic terms.
A valuable example illustrating the features of slang in professional communication comes from Fox, Fertleman, Cahill and Palmer [Fox et al. 2003]. The authors analyse the origins and functions of medical slang in British medical establishment, as well as attempt at a classification of the material studied, before listing nearly 200 slang units presented with their explanation. In their research the authors identify the moment medical professionals start using slang. The initial reluctance to use medical slang recedes once students begin their practice/internship in teaching hospitals at later years of their medical studies, and the use of slang peaks in the first years in the profession. Slang is not as frequent (or at least is less derogatory) in the discourse of more senior medical professionals. Possibly one reason is that with time physicians realise they can be held accountable for the language they use.

Three major reasons are thought to be behind the use of slang: it helps (i) overcome anxieties encountered during normal medical practice, (ii) express frustration and anger against a patient group and (iii) maintain social grouping and rapport. The authors also name the derivational processes that give rise to medical slang. The most straightforward method is by acronym, reflecting the need for abbreviation in communication. Another method is by metaphor, whose origin “may be humorous use of more conventional terminology”. Surprising as it might seem for a medical profession, the largest group of slang units constitutes simple obscenity and derogatory name-calling. A final but important source for slang is euphemism [Fox et al. 2003: 174-176].

(ii)
Based on the considerations presented above it is possible to suggest an operational definition of non-standard professional vocabulary as well as distil its major characteristics.

Non-standard professional vocabulary can be defined as: informal vocabulary used to communicate professional (specialised) knowledge and profession-related subjects, developed by a professional group in a spontaneous natural communication (usually spoken discourse), and used predominantly in unofficial situations.

Undeniably, the value of non-standard professional vocabulary in specialised communication should not be underestimated. Since informal specialised/professional communication, at least within the same national language, can take place without referring to official/standard(ised) terminology, and in view of the assertion that the quality of communication (i.e. its effectiveness) depends in the quality of content-bearing units [Języki specjalistyczne... 2005: 51], it is reasonable to consider non-standard (informal) professional vocabulary as an effective carrier of professional knowledge. It is assumed that the conceptual structure of the non-standard professional vocabulary unit as well as its behaviour (a) in texts (including frequency, distribution and collocability, etc.) and (b) within interactional structures (e.g. interactional frames), reveal the unit’s potential as a macrosign of professional knowledge, even if it is devoid of clear system-creating features [Gajda 1990: 42]. If we further assume that such units are expressive synonyms of official designations [Gajda 1990: 42], the status of non-standard professional vocabulary as signs of professional knowledge seems to be fully confirmed and equal to that other terminological synonyms. It is, however,
necessary to realise that non-standard professional vocabulary unit, similarly to a terminological synonym, may represent a specialised concept (i.e. its meaning) a certain degree: in fact, we may be dealing at some point with two distinct specialised concepts, one represented by the term proper, and the other by a non-standard professional vocabulary unit (e.g. professional slang expression).

A parallel issue related to both non-standard professional vocabulary and terminology proper concerns the ‘quantum of knowledge’ represented by linguistic units in question. Units of the informal vocabulary stock and the terminological lexicon alike, differ from other terms being at the same level of hierarchy, or from, e.g. their synonymous or other-language equivalents, in respect of their ‘specificity’, i.e. the strength and quality of the link with respective denotata and designata [Grucza 2008: 190]. Moreover, each unit/term can refer to a different conceptual scope, which – in case of application of quantitative only – is not verifiable. Accordingly, quantitative as well as qualitative methods must be used for extraction of the vocabulary and study of their meaning.

(iii)

There are many points of similarity between general slang/jargon and non-standard professional vocabulary. This is why it is possible to derive some features of the latter on the basis of the characteristics of the former, supplemented with features offered by other scholars [see e.g. Hudson 1978: 1-21; Dobkiewicz 2013]. Below is the list of most fundamental features and functions of non-standard professional vocabulary.

Features:
– naturalness (spontaneity),
– informality,
– efficiency (condensation, abbreviation),
– restricted use/group of users,
– unconventionality (lack of standardisation),
– not subject to strict norms (but not a substandard),
– expressiveness (emotional connotations),
– existence of regional variations,
– less stable than terminology proper,
– etc.

Functions:
– creating group identity,
– establishing and maintaining group rapport,
– ensuring communicative efficiency (within the group),

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14 It needs to be underlined, however, that the values are gradual and relative, in particular when we take into account knowledge of individual speakers-listeners.

15 Terms can refer to concepts of different intension (i.e. content of the concept = set of its features) as well as it extension (i.e. the range of objects (including abstract ones) described by the concept in question).

16 It is worthy of mention that the ‘understanding’ of a vocabulary/terminological unit (as well as whole specialised texts) depends on the knowledge of the individual: the same linguistic unit may activate qualitatively different conceptual fields.
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– retaining emotional equilibrium (raising morale, providing support, helping overcome job-related anxieties),
– offering secrecy (e.g. through vagueness),
– etc.

Despite its similarity to general slang, non-standard professional vocabulary does not share all of the characteristics of the former. In particular, there is no desire to defy standards/authority or express rebelliousness in professional communication. Also, non-standard professional vocabulary units do not mutate as readily as general slang does, although some instability is inherent in the vocabulary. Imprecision (at least in relation to specialised concepts) would be highly undesirable among group members, and if used, is aimed at concealing specific information from outsiders and maintain group impenetrability. Yet, similarly to general slang, non-standard professional vocabulary can in some cases be a more efficient and precise means of professional communication, it can be used to convey some additional layer of information (e.g. humour, speaker’s state of mind, idiosyncratic view of the world/subject-matter, etc.), and it is used to strengthen the group. [cf. Kania 1995: 14-16; Kołłątaj 2010: 94; Widawski 2000: IX; Widawski 2008] The fact remains that the features and functions of non-standard professional vocabulary will differ to a lesser or greater extent across professions and languages.

6. Conclusion

It comes as no surprise that professional communication can range from highly formal to highly informal, depending on the broader and narrower extralinguistic context and resulting in a careful choice of appropriate language means. While it is true that informal communication at a workplace can concern non-work-related matters and that the boundary between professional and casual topics can be blurred, the present paper focuses on informal communication focussed on profession-related subjects.

It is believed that non-standard professional vocabulary may be on a par with terminology proper as regards their informational and communicative value. Yet, this area of specialised communication is only superficially studied and poorly represented in LSP educational materials, including dictionaries. Meanwhile, Widawski aptly notes that from the lexicographic perspective each word, be it slang or not, deserves to be registered and included in a dictionary. Unfortunately, informal vocabulary […] is – for one reason or another – omitted from most Polish-English and English-Polish dictionaries [Widawski 2000: V]. With only a handful of LSP dictionaries registering informal professional vocabulary (slang, jargon, colloquialism), and in light of the developing international market and numerous multinational companies around, along with almost no structured sources for the authors of LSP materials, the need for a bilingual dictionary of non-standard professional vocabulary is even more pressing.

17 Widawski [2008] provides by far the most comprehensive list of the motives (=functions) of general slang. Yet, only some of the functions may pertain to non-standard professional vocabulary.

18 In fact, non-standard vocabulary, on account of the ‘added meaning’ should be regarded as linguistically richer.
One of the first steps in dictionary design is identification of the entry unit making up a headword in the final work. However, with so many vague definitions of the various types of informal vocabulary, it was necessary to define the operational unit of the dictionary and extract its essential characteristics so as allow efficient extraction of appropriate lemma stock as well as its precise description in the prospective dictionary. It needs to be emphasised that both quantitative and qualitative means of data extraction are necessitated. Moreover, “[a]n LSP lexicographer must be aware of the fact that informal and slang words may be short-lived and be substituted by other colloquial and colourful words from oral communication – and that slang words may gradually lose their connotations and become stylistically neutral words, and even terms” [Gläser 2000: 86]. This entails systematic (ongoing) study of professional discourse by way of spoken and written corpora, registering new units and verifying their current use and status. Unfortunately, the task might not be feasible unless automatic speech-to-text algorithms are more effective (as well as multilingual) and available (affordable), and the units to be extracted and analysed well-defined in the machine code, which in itself is not achievable without unified linguistic approach to sociolinguistic terms.

References

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Although scholars holding the traditional view on terminology regard non-standard professional vocabulary as an undesirable deviation from the norm, such lexis plays a very important communicative and social role: not only does it augment the flow of specialised information, but it also cements professional community. Undeniably, however, such in-group talk is highly impenetrable for an outsider, including beginner trainees. Therefore, it is sometimes proposed that teaching materials, including LSP textbooks, should present slang or jargon expressions to facilitate natural professional com-
communication. One of the reference works that could answer the needs of neophytes as well as become an important resource for the authors of LSP materials and linguists interested in the informal layer of specialised sociolects is a dictionary of non-standard professional vocabulary. One of the issues that an LSP lexicographer faces is the appropriate selection of the dictionary headwords. This paper offers some considerations regarding informal professional vocabulary and suggests a definition and features of non-standard professional vocabulary units that might prove helpful in lemma selection procedure.

Key words: contrastive analysis, professional slang, professional jargon, professionalism, LSP dictionary, slang lexicography, register, sociolect, professional community