

SHIPPING NEWS

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ABSTRACT

Reports on the movement of shipping vessels in and out of English harbours have appeared as newsworthy items among English news reports from the very beginning of English newspaper publication. The earliest examples in the *ZEN* Corpus, which was used for this study, date from 1671. As shipping news grew in importance they acquired the status of a separate text class and were printed with specific headlines, such as *SHIP NEWS*, *PORT NEWS*, or *HOME PORTS*.

This paper describes the beginnings of the text class as colourful reports, its growth during the 18th century, and its apparent decline towards the end of the century, when it became more and more formulaic and telegraphic in style and moved away from news reports to the advertisement section.

1. Introduction

In early English newspapers shipping news used to be a regular feature. In the *ZEN* Corpus¹ we tried to mark important text classes, first of all HOME NEWS and FOREIGN NEWS. Beyond this distinction, we also marked some special text classes, which belong to the news sections of the papers, in order to enable comparison through the centuries: we established a text class for CRIME and another for ACCIDENTS. Some news-reports we marked because we believe they show a clearly restricted range of vocabulary and similar sentence structures: BIRTHS, DEATHS, LOST-AND-FOUND, and SHIP NEWS.

¹ *ZEN, The Zurich English Newspaper Corpus*. Version 1.0. Englisch Seminar Universität Zürich, available at <http://es-zen.unizh>.

Whereas a modern reader may wonder what an item classified as SHIP NEWS may consist of, an 18th-century reader would immediately have known what information to expect in a report headed *SHIP NEWS*. Shipping news was common in many newspapers.

2. Headers

In the strictest sense, we will call SHIP NEWS all, and only, those texts that 18th-century newspaper producers themselves classified as *SHIP NEWS*. This yields a sub-corpus of *ZEN* consisting of 36 sections of SHIP NEWS, dating from 1751 to 1791,² from 10 different newspapers. There are some papers that stopped publishing shipping news at a certain point and others which never published it at all.

Besides the headline *SHIP NEWS* we find, as an alternative formulation, sections with a headline *PORT NEWS*. There are 19 such sections in the Corpus between 1731 and 1761. They set in earlier than the headers *SHIP NEWS*, but also cease earlier, and extend our corpus to 55 items.

There is a third group of similar news texts, headed *HOME PORTS* which appeared in 1731 and 1751, comprising a total of 8 items, increasing the Corpus to 63 sections of shipping news. The newspapers where these shipping news sections are found are all listed in Table 1.

Table 1. SHIP NEWS, PORT NEWS, and HOME PORTS in the *ZEN* Corpus

	SHIP NEWS	PORT NEWS	HOME PORTS
1731		<i>Read's Weekly Journal</i>	<i>The Daily Journal</i>
1741		<i>Daily Post</i>	
1751	<i>London Morning Penny Post</i>		<i>London Daily Advertiser</i>
1761	<i>The London Chronicle</i>	<i>London Evening Post</i> <i>The Public Ledger</i> <i>Read's Weekly Journal</i>	
1771	<i>Bingley's Journal</i> <i>General Evening Post</i> <i>London Evening Post</i> <i>Middlesex Journal</i>		

² The examples in the *ZEN* Corpus are taken in 10-year intervals.

1781	<i>The London Chronicle</i>
	<i>The Morning Chronicle</i>
	<i>The Morning Herald</i>
1791	<i>Evening Mail</i>
	<i>The London Chronicle</i>
	<i>The Morning Chronicle</i>
	<i>The Public Advertiser</i>

3. Text class

Taking the contents of the text class SHIP NEWS as a criterion, ship news did not suddenly spring up in 1731, but had had a long history. There are examples right from the first newspapers in the ZEN Corpus, i.e. from 1671. The one major difference is that these early examples do not have a headline marking them as ship news. They simply begin with a dateline, and then give the reader the information about a ship's arrival, departure, or presence in a particular port.

Between 1671 and 1721 we find shipping news in many English newspapers (listed in Table 2), and even from 1731 up to 1791, some papers continued publishing the shipping news without a corresponding headline. Even those papers that introduced the new headline carried on publishing similar items outside, or beside, the paragraphs entitled SHIP NEWS.

Table 2. Shipping news before 1731

1671	<i>The Current Intelligence</i>				
1691	<i>The London Gazette</i>				
1701	<i>The English Post</i>	1711	<i>The Evening Post</i>	1721	<i>New State of Europe</i>
	<i>The London Post</i>		<i>The Daily Courant</i>		<i>Applebee's Weekly Journal</i>
	<i>The Flying Post</i>		<i>The Flying Post</i>		<i>The Flying Post</i>
	<i>The Post Boy</i>		<i>The Post Boy</i>		<i>The Post Boy</i>
	<i>The Post Man</i>		<i>The Post Man</i>		<i>The Post Man</i>
	<i>The London Gazette</i>		<i>The London Gazette</i>		-----

Typical examples look like this:

1) *Falmouth, Sept. 16.*

On the 14th arrived the Boscawen Packet Boat in 10 Days from Lisbon
(1721fpt04478:s:13.1).

Sailed the Lynn Frigat, for Mountsbay, to load Pilchards for the Streights
(1721fpt04478:s:13.2).

Plymouth, Sept. 17.

Yesterday came in the Hope for this Place, from St. Sebastian
(1721fpt04478:s:15.1).

Deal, Sept. 19.

His Majesty's Sloops, Otter and Swift sailed Westward with all the Outward bound
(1721fpt04478:s:17.1).

This Morning came down and sailed Westward His Majesty's Ship Faulkland, also the Crown Captain Willis for Barbadoes
(1721fpt04478:s:17.2).

Altogether, the corpus consists of 878 instances of shipping news. There is a relatively small number of items in the 17th century, up to 1701. The heyday of shipping news was between 1711 and 1761; the number decreases again after 1761 until the end of the century.

What all these texts have in common is the reference to a ship, and its movement into or out of a harbour, typically an English port, or the observation of a ship passing by or remaining in a port.

In the south of England, the harbours from which news emanated most frequently were those in Table 3.

Table 3. Names of ports

Falmouth	Milford
Cowes	Penzance
Deal	Port of London
Gravesend	Portsmouth
Plymouth	Waterford

The most important one was Deal, sometimes only referred to as "In the Downs".

4. Time reference

Many shipping news items have two time references, one in the dateline (referring to the source of the news) and another one in the text itself, indicating the day of the event reported.

2) *Deal, August 15.*

Yesterday arrived and sail'd Anna Maria, Hampton, from Petersburg, for Leghorn (1751gat05250:s:2.1).

Cowes, Aug. 14.

On the 12th came in the Diligence, Everden, for Newfoundland (1751gat05250:s:8.1).

The two time references taken together give us an exact date of the arrival, departure or time in port of the ships mentioned.

In sentence initial position, the time adverbial triggers inversion of subject and predicate.

3) This Day came in the York from the Downs (1711dct02870:s:18.2).

Yesterday at 3 in the Afternoon arrived the Dispatch Pacquet-Boat... (1711dct03167:s:21.1).

Yesterday sailed the outward-bound West-India and Lisbon-Fleet... (1711fpt03058:s:12.1).

Instances without S-V inversion occur almost as frequently, but never quite as often as those with inversion, in the early and late years, but they do not significantly increase when the type with sentence-initial adverbial becomes normal between 1711 and 1761.

4) This Morning six Dutch Men of War arriv'd here with six East-India Ships from Holland (1711evp00311:s:33.1).

Yesterday her Majesty's Ship the Mary Galley, Captain Sanderson Commander, came in here, and brought as Prize the la Joyeuse of Diepe, with Wines from Bourdeaux for Dunkirk, burthen about forty Tuns (1711lgz04792:s:10.1).

The examples clearly show that inversion is unlikely whenever there is an informationally heavy predicate that takes end-position. In the course of the 18th century, when shipping news became more and more stereotyped, these instances decrease in frequency.

Time adverbials also occur after the subject and predicate. This is a very mixed group and would certainly need further attention.

- 5) Our Ships from New-Castle came in yesterday... (1671cui00004:s:32.1).

Several Vessels are arrived here within these few daies...

(1671cui00004:s:38.1).

The Fleet bound for the West-Indies, and other places, went hence on the 14th, under Convoy of the Eagle and Unicorn (1671cui00006:s:45.1).

Finally, when the time adverbial occurs in second position, it immediately follows the verb, which it explicitly modifies. This type occurs only in complex shipping news items.

- 6) Came down yesterday and remain in the Downs with the ships as per last, the Amity's Advice, Longbottom, a victualler (1761lcr00667:s:161.2).

Came down yesterday his Majesty's ship Wager, and Wasp sloop, and Hopewell, Wise, for Portsmouth, and remain in the Downs with the ships as before, and the Mary Anne, Slayer, for the West Indies

(1761lcr00675:s:167.2).

Came down yesterday his Majesty's sloop Fly, and sailed this morning with the Cruizer, Ferret, Wasp, and Dispatch sloops, and the Wager and Arethusa men of war, to the westward

(1761lcr00675:s:239.2).

5. The Predicate

The number of different verbs used as predicate is very small. In initial position we come across *arrive*, *come in*, *come down*, *sail*, *remain* and *pass by*. In sentence-initial position the use of these verbs is text-class specific, that means, they do not occur anywhere else in the newspaper corpus at the beginning of a sentence. More often than not they are followed by the definite article, and are therefore easily retrievable by any search program.

- 7) Arrived the Province, Stewart, for Dublin (1751lmp01416:s:29.2).

Sailed the St. Peter, Borgeson, of and for Frederickshall;

(1731dct09250:s:36.2).

The formulations used are typical for the style that we know from modern summaries of biographical dates, for instance, at the end of a biography or list of historical dates in a chronology. As the 18th century progressed, the text class

SHIP NEWS becomes more and more stereotyped, probably due to the increasing number of ship movements to be reported. Therefore there are more and more enumerations of ship names, and the definite article in front of a ship's name is dropped for the sake of space. The use of *ditto* increases. Of the 147 instances of *ditto* in the whole corpus, almost half of them belong to the shipping news.

- 8) Pass'd by the St. Petersburg, Dunkin, from Petersburg; Hopewell, Hudson, from ditto; (1751gat05250:s:4.1).

Looking at the verbs from a lexicological point of view, *come in* and *come down* are the most interesting ones. *Come in* is straightforward and means, according to the *OED*, 'to move or advance inwards; to arrive here at its destination; to enter the port, goal, etc.'; the earliest examples are from the 17th century.

- 9) **a1626** BACON (J.), Our second fleet, which kept the narrow seas, was come in and joined to our main fleet.
1667 DRYDEN *Sir Martin Mar-all* V. i, Here's another of our vessels come in.

For *come down*, however, although there are many different shades of meaning given by the *OED*, it is only the most general one that fits our passages.

- 10) 60. come down. a. To descend (hither), to come to what is, or is spoken of as, a lower place:

Come down, in shipping news is restricted to arrivals in Deal – or “in the Downs” mentioned above. One does not *come down* to other harbours. Deal was perhaps the most important place for ships' anchorage before the invention of the steamer. According to the Deal Maritime and Local History Museum: “The town of Lower Deal came into existence to serve the needs of the shipping in the anchorage. It had no other purpose!” (<http://home.freeuk.net/deal-museum/history.html>). Ships anchored in Lower Deal for protection and to be serviced.

Come down, therefore, means to arrive at a low-level place, called appropriately *the Downs*. It is not surprising, therefore, that the continuation of the journey is very often mentioned in the same sentence.

We find *came down the* + ship name (22 examples), *came down and sail* (28 examples), *came down and remain* (11 examples), *came down and anchor* (2 examples), *came down and are still here* (1 example).

Reports of *came down and* are the most frequent ones.

- 11) Came down and sailed the Race-horse, Engledine, for Guinea
(1751lda00144:s:66.2).

Came down and remains the Trithon, Shirley, for Philadelphia; and The
Marmaduke, Bowman for Lisbon (1751lmp03102:s:36.1).

The increasing number of individual shipping movements led, from the middle of the 18th century, to a further abbreviation or condensation of the elements in the text class SHIP NEWS. The verb is taken out of the sentence and functions as a headline followed by lists of the ships' names. The following example is an early one, from 1741, and it still shows a full sentence as its first element, only to be followed by a list of names.

- 12) *Arrived at several Ports.*
The Marlborough, Gordon, from St. Kitts; and the Grace, ———, from
New York, are arrived at Bristol.
The Mercury, Franklin, from Maryland, off Dover.
The South-River Merchant, Hall; Alexander, Russel and Peggy,
Donaldson, from London, at Maryland.
The Bladen, Adams, from London and Boston, at Virginia
(1741ldp02074:s:74.1).

This is a simple way of combining news from foreign ports with ship news from home.

The various types exist next to one another. In the following example from 1771, there is first a series of straightforward, traditional items of ship news, followed by a list of arrivals.

- 13) SHIP-NEWS.
DEAL, JAN. 10. Wind. N. N. W. Remain his Majesty's ships Juno
and Cerberus. Came down and sailed the Friends Adventure, Roberts, for
Plymouth. Arrived the Elizabeth, Somerville, from Zant.
GRAVESEND, JAN. 10. Sailed by the Hudson, Bacon, from Mary-
land; Britannia, Doverson, from Boston; and Hopewell, Smith, from New
York.
Arrivals at the following Ports.
Dartmouth: Polly, Roberts, from St. Uber's; Elizabeth, Prettyjohn, from
St. Sebastian's; and Scarborough, Henly, from Viana.
Bristol: Weston, Alward, from Newfoundland; Sophia-Cecilia, Watson,
and Hawks, Cowan, from Corke.

Falmouth: Thomas and Mary, Crampton, from Waterford.
 Corunna: Terra-Nova, Trent, from Newfoundland.
 Milford: Alice, Ridley, from Newry; and Lowther and Senhouse, Williamson, from New-England (1771gep05813:d:208).

In its final stage the person responsible for including the information has even forgotten to give the name of the port of arrival or departure: where these ships entered into or where they cleared out from. In addition, the text has moved out of the news section of the newspaper into the advertisement section.

- 14) SHIPS entered Inwards, April 6.
 Anna Elenora, Jan Bremer, from Dantzick
 Fortuna, P. Bassiat, from Norway
 Orion, F. A. Wienberg, from Gottenburgh.
 SHIPS cleared Outwards, April 6.
 Eagle, John Curling, and
 Baltick Merchant, Tho. Penny, for Maryland
 Benevolence, T. Hooper, for Virginia
 Guadalupe Merchant, A. Ouchterlony, for Corke, &c.
 Trotman, Tho. Noel, for the West Indies (1761pul00388:s:379.1).

We have reached a stage when the text type ceases to be of interest to both the linguist and the historian in us. All the additional information that was often present in earlier items, and which could not be discussed here, are missing. In particular, this holds true for the items ships brought from abroad or were forced to bring in. Here are two early examples.

- 15) A Portugal is come in laden with Oyls and Sugar, bound for London (1671cui00004:s:44.3).
 The Paradox brought into this Harbour on the 13th instant, the St. John of Bayon laden with French Wines, and the Lucrecia from Bruges, laden with eight hundred bags of Spanish Wool, Iron, &c. (1671cui00006:s:41.1).

The phrase *laden with* was almost exclusively used with reference to ships, only in the second half of the 18th century was it also applied to military transports on land.

6. Conclusion

Shipping news was an important feature of 18th-century newspapers. A text class SHIP NEWS started to establish itself in the late 17th century and was about to lose importance at the end of the 18th century. Originally a normal item of

news reporting, it soon developed into one separated from other news by text class specific headlines. In the course of the 18th century it became more and more stereotyped and was moved away from other news items into the advertising section of the newspapers. A few specific phrases and constructions occur almost exclusively in this text class.

With the help of the *ZEN* Corpus, one can go a long way in describing and analysing this text class, but, as always, there are texts beyond the Corpus, which we should not forget to look at as well.