

LINGUISTICS AND VIETNAMESE LINGUISTICS

STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF COAST GUARD TERMS IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the structural features of Coast guard terms in English using a corpus of 1,900 terms collected from operational documents and international maritime agreements, such as UNCLOS (1982). Applying the Immediate Constituent (IC) Analysis method and structural linguistic theory, the research analyses the number of elements, word classes, and formation methods, including compounding, derivation, and nominal phrases.

The results demonstrate that nominalization is the governing principle of the entire system, with nouns overwhelmingly dominating all structural types. Nominal phrases (18.54%), derivative words (5.67%), and compounding (51.35%) are found to be the most productive formation methods. Usually employed to name intricate legal and technical ideas (e.g., regional marine search and rescue center), the maximum structural length exceeds five elements. All terms follow a main-subordinate structure model, which ensures information condensation, systematicity, and absolute precision.

Overall, English Coast guard terms form a highly specialised and tightly structured system, designed to meet the requirements of accuracy and unambiguity in international maritime operations. These findings provide a solid linguistic foundation for standardising terms and improving the effectiveness of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training for Coast guard personnel.

KEY WORDS: Structural features; coast guard terms; English; IC Analysis; structural model.

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1. Introduction

The Coast guard has become a powerful force and a quickly growing professional field in the modern era, along with increased international integration. The long-standing idea of maritime law enforcement has significantly impacted all facets of security and national defence. Operations in the Coast guard involve unique concepts and categories, just like many other professional domains. Specialised terms represent these categories and concepts.

There are applications for linguistic research and socio-legal life when studying Coast guard terms. Due to the limited framework of this paper, the concept of Coast guard terms is applied to the study of terms related to law enforcement activities, naval operational rules, maritime security threats, international maritime conventions, and specialised equipment. Based on the standards of terms and the professional characteristics of the maritime security sector, 1900 English terms were selected as the survey data. Of these, 50 English terms exist in abbreviated form.

Hence, the author will describe, analyse, and evaluate the structural features of 1850 English terms in terms of the following aspects: number of term elements, term formation methods and word classes, origin of term elements, and structural model.

2. A research overview

The structural features of terms constitute a core element in terminological research, especially in fields demanding absolute standardization and high command efficiency, such as Coast guard terms.

This work selectively inherits and develops upon established research, focusing on constructing a concentrated model for in-depth morphological analysis.

Internationally, the theoretical foundation pillar of the Pioneer orientation was established by Wuster (1931) and Felber (1984), who established the General Theory of Terminology (GTT). In the legal and military fields, where structural ambiguity can result in operational errors, their strongest arguments were for the development of absolute monosemy and the importance of context-

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independent morphology (“one-concept-one-term”). Sager, J.C. (1990) provided systematic techniques for determining structural features. The study used Immediate Constituent Analysis (IC Analysis), a micro-methodological mechanism that Darwish (2003) claimed was used extensively. The predominant structural type, complicated multi-word nominals, requires this syntactic dissection technique. Understanding the English structural condensation model is also essential.

In Vietnam, starting with the need for national language standardization, Hoàng Xuân Hãn (1942) and Lê Quang Thiêm (2015) established the basic morphological principles and conceptual precision. Lê Văn Thôi (1970) looked at formation concepts, which clearly emphasize structural analysis. Lưu Văn Lăng (1987) and Vũ Quang Hào (1993) focused on the significance of structural analysis in system construction and examined the mechanism of complex evolution. Although specialized research on the structure of Vietnamese Coast guard terms has not yet formed an independent theoretical field, and the data primarily originates from a statutory and formal orientation, these works provide a crucial empirical and morphological basis for applying international structural models to the Vietnamese language.

Based on this overview and the adopted specialised findings, this study establishes three basic conclusions about the structural features of Coast guard terms in English: (1) nouns and noun phrases make up most terms, reflecting the essence of conceptualisation and the compression of information peculiar to a particular specialty. (2) abbreviations, compounds, derivatives, and single words are among the forms that exhibit optimal language economy. (3) the maximum length is 05 elements (*thành tố*), establishing a balance between information condensation and cognitive processing limits for critical operational commands. Consequently, the concept of the term’s element (*thành tố*) is selected as the core unit of analysis, with each element containing a concept or characteristic (*Examples: sea/guard, patrol/vessel*), forming the basis for the quantitative and qualitative structural analysis of Coast guard terms.

3. Approaches and methodology

A thorough dual-methodological approach was used in this study to analyze the structural characteristics of English Coast guard terms. This approach is recommended by Sager (1990) to guarantee both qualitative richness and quantitative precision in terminological study.

3.1. Descriptive method: Immediate Constituent (IC) Analysis

The descriptive method utilised Immediate Constituent Analysis (IC Analysis) as its primary qualitative tool. This technique is extensively used in linguistic analysis, as Darwish (2003) noted. Researchers were able to recursively break down structures into their bare minimum concept bearing pieces (*H1, H2, etc.*) by methodically breaking down complicated multi-word nominals, which were the major term type. In complex terms, Lê Văn Thôi (1970) claimed that this painstaking dissection was crucial to the creation of the abstract structural models that correspond with the need for structural analysis.

3.2. Statistical analysis

The computation of frequencies and percentages throughout the 1900 term corpus was the main objective of this approach. This study confirmed that different structural models were proportionately represented based on element count and identified productivity forms of word construction, such as compounding and nominal phrases (Plag, 2003), which validated descriptive data.

The findings were more reliable and clear because of the additional help provided by modelling, which turns observed patterns into succinct formulas, and tabulation, which arranges all quantitative data in a scientific manner.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Structural features of Coast Guard terms in English based on the number of elements

4.1.1.1. Coast Guard terms as single words

Regarding the concept of the minimum constituent unit of terms, León-Araúz & Cabezas-García (2024) assert: “the minimum constituent unit is the independent element, which cannot be further subdivided and inherently carries a specialized concept, which can be a noun, a verb, or an adjective.”. In English, each term composed of a single word includes an independent morpheme and contains a single term element.

According to our survey, among the 1850 Coast guard terms surveyed, 452 terms are composed of a single element (accounting for 24.43%). This is a significant proportion, confirming the priority of conciseness in naming basic concepts. Examples include *patrol*, *radar*, *vessel*, *coast*, *seize*, *etc.*

4.1.1.2. Coast guard terms as derivative words

The derivative word is a systematic and highly productive term-formation mechanism, created by the combination of a free morpheme (root) and one or more bound morphemes (affixes). According to Plag (2003) in *Word-Formation in English*, this mechanism performs the crucial function of word-class changing or semantic scope refinement, which is paramount in creating complex legal and operational concepts from simple roots. A derivative word comprises a minimum of two term elements.

Based on the total of 1850 Coast guard terms surveyed, we recorded 105 terms as derivative words, accounting for 5.67% of the total. The distribution of elements is detailed in the following table:

Table 1. Number of structural elements of Coast guard terms as derivative words

Number of structural elements	Number of terms as derivative words	Percentage (%)
Two elements	95	5.14
Three elements	10	0.54
Total	105/1850	5.67

The analysis of derivative terms confirms that the vast majority are two-element structures (95 terms, 5.14% of the total). This prevalence demonstrates grammatical economy, where affixes are efficiently used to convert basic actions or nouns into functional concepts required for statutory purposes. Examples include converting the verb *seize* to the legal noun *seizure*, and the noun *coast* to the scope adjective *coastal*.

Notably, three-element structures are present in a small proportion (10 terms, 0.54%). These terms exhibit maximum information density within a single word. The typical example, *antisubmarine*, illustrates the effort to simultaneously specify the action direction (counter) and the detailed object/environment (under the sea) a vital characteristic of highly specific military and maritime security technical terms.

4.1.1.3. Coast guard terms as compound words

The process of combining two or more independent words to form a new lexical unit, is the most productive word formation mechanism in English. It's an efficient way to name complex entities and concepts compactly. In a survey of 1850 Coast Guard terms in English, 950 (or 51.35%) were identified as compound words, confirming that compounding is the primary method for building this specialized terms. The compound terms in this corpus were found to have a maximum of three elements.

Table 2. Number of structural elements of Coast guard terms as compound words

Number of structural elements	Number of terms as compound words	Percentage (%)
Two elements	740	40.00
Three elements	210	11.35
Total	950/1850	51.35

Based on the data, Coast guard compound terms are structured with either two or three elements.

Two-element structure: This is the most common form, making up 740 terms (40.00%). Typically following a Noun + Noun pattern (e.g., *Coast guard, seaport*), this structure is preferred for its conciseness and ease of identification in operational settings.

Three-element structure: Though less frequent with 210 terms (11.35%), this structure efficiently combines complex, high-information concepts into a single unit. It is used to name multi-dimensional operations and concepts, such as air-sea rescue and marine casualty investigation.

4.1.1.4. English Coast Guard terms as nominal phrases

Nominal Phrases (NPs) are highly expandable structures that combine multiple elements to name concepts with a precision that single words cannot achieve. This structure is common in specialized texts, reflecting high lexical density and the practice of turning actions and qualities into nouns.

In a survey of 1850 Coast guard terms in English, 343 terms (18.54%) were identified as nominal phrases. This significant proportion highlights the crucial role of NPs in defining the complex, multi-dimensional concepts specific to this field. These phrases consist of at least two structural elements.

Table 3. Number of structural elements of Coast guard terms as nominal phrases

Number of structural elements	Number of terms as nominal phrases	Percentage (%)
Two elements	95	5.14
Three elements	190	10.27
Four elements	58	3.14
Total	343/1850	18.54

Coast guard terms in English formed by nominal phrases have a maximum length of four elements, as shown in Table 3.

Two-element structure (95 terms, 5.14%): Uses a single modifier (Adj + N or N + N) to refine the core concept. Examples: restricted area, fishing license.

Three-element structure (190 terms, 10.27%): The most common structure, providing an optimal balance between legal precision and conciseness. Examples: exclusive economic zone, marine protected area.

Four-element structure (58 terms, 3.14%): Represents the maximum structural complexity. These are typically used for naming international or cross-sectoral regulations and operations, integrating multiple parameters for precise designation. Examples: international safety management code, search and rescue operation.

The existence of these longer, complex nominal phrases, particularly the four-element type, confirms the need to designate hyper-complex concepts in the Coast Guard domain, thereby minimizing ambiguity and ensuring strict adherence to international regulations.

4.1.2. Structural features of Coast guard terms in English based on term formation methods and word classes

The survey was conducted on a total of 1850 Coast Guard terms in English (*excluding 50 abbreviated terms*).

4.1.2.1. Coast guard terms as single words

Out of the 1850 Coast guard terms, we identified 560 terms as single words. This table presents the word classes of these terms, which serves as the basis for evaluating the grammatical function distribution of the minimum elements in the specialized corpus:

Table 4. Word classes of Coast guard terms composed of single words

Term type	Word class	Number of terms	Percentage (%)
Single Word	Noun	350	18.92
	Verb	40	2.16
	Adjective	160	8.65
Total		560/1850	30.33

The 560 single-word Coast guard terms in English (30.33% of the total corpus), nouns are overwhelmingly dominant (18.92%), reflecting the terminological domain's static, conceptualizing nature and the core role of nominalization (e.g., patrol, vessel). Adjectives (8.65%) and verbs (2.16%) appear in much lower proportions. Verbs are rare as complete terms, as actions are usually nominalized (enforcement) or expressed in complex phrases.

4.1.2.2. Coast guard terms as compound words

Compounding is the most productive term formation mechanism in English, particularly in specialized corpora, where it serves the purpose of creating complex concepts by combining independent roots. The survey results regarding the word classes of Coast guard terms as compound words are described in the following table:

Table 5. Word classes of Coast guard terms composed of compound words

Term type	Word class	Number of terms	Percentage (%)
Compound word	Noun	850	45.95
	Verb	40	2.16
	Adjective	228	12.32
Total		1118/1850	60.43

In the 1,118 compound Coast Guard terms, nouns are overwhelmingly dominant (45.95%). The table confirms that the primary function of compounding is entity conceptualization, naming specialized items (e.g., coastline, shipyard).

Adjectives (12.32%) are also significant, as compounding effectively creates complex attributes to describing capabilities (e.g., long-range, deep-sea). Verbs are minimal (2.16%); actions are usually converted into nouns for greater stability and conciseness in specialized terms.

Among English Coast Guard terms that are compound words, nouns still account for the largest number because compounding primarily serves the purpose of entity conceptualization. Verbs appear in insignificant proportions, while adjectives occupy a substantial part to describe specific attributes.

4.1.2.3. English Coast Guard terms as derivative words

Derivative terms are constructed from a root word combined with prefixes or suffixes. This method allows for the creation of word variations and in-depth semantic refinement from core morphemes. The distribution of word classes among derivative terms is shown in Table 6, based on the provided sample size of 1150:

Table 6. Word classes of Coast guard terms composed of derivative words

Term Type	Word Class	Number of Terms	Percentage (%)
Derivative (with prefix)	Noun	04	0.34

Derivative (with suffix)	Noun	23	2.0
	Adjective	11	0.95
Derivative (with both prefix and suffix)	Adjective	01	0.08
Total		39/1150	3.37

Derivative terms make up only 3.37% of the corpus, reflecting the preference for compounding and nominal phrases in specialized English.

Suffix-based terms dominate (34 terms), primarily used for nominalizing actions or creating specialized adjectives for legal/functional concepts (e.g., legalization, navigable).

Prefixes and complex derivatives are very rare (5 terms total). Despite their low number, derivatives are essential for enhancing semantic specificity and refining word class.

4.1.2.4. English Coast Guard terms as nominal phrases

The nominal phrase (NP) is the dominant term formation mechanism because it offers the highest potential for absolute precision and unambiguity in specialized language.

All surveyed English Coast Guard terms composed of phrases are exclusively nominal phrases (0% verbal/adjectival phrases). This confirms the inherent nominalization nature of specialized terminology, where long phrases are necessary to integrate multiple conceptual parameters into a single unit.

Table 7. Word classes of Coast guard terms composed of nominal phrases

Term type	Word class	Number of terms (out of 1,850)	Percentage (%)
Nominal phrase	Two elements	95	5.14
	Three elements	190	10.27
	Four elements	53	2.86
	Five elements	5	0.27
Total		343/1850	18.54

Nominal phrases (NPs), which create high information density terms, reach a maximum length of five elements to ensure the maximum conceptual differentiation required by international maritime regulations.

- Three-element NPs are the most common (10.27%), defining zones and systems (e.g., exclusive economic zone).

- Five-element NPs (0.27%) represent hyper-complex terms, integrating multiple parameters (scope, function, area) into a single designation for the highest level of precision (e.g., regional maritime search and rescue center).

This range of lengths allows the Coast guard domain to meet demands for accuracy and compliance with complex regulations.

4.1.3. Structural features of Coast guard terms in terms of structural model

The structural model describes the systematic combination of elements (morphemes) that form English Coast guard terms (including single words, compounds, derivatives, and nominal phrases).

To analyze these structures, we use the symbol H (Element). Individual structural elements are sequentially labeled.

4.1.3.1. Structural model of Coast guard terms composed of 1 element (Single word)

Example: radar, vessel, seize

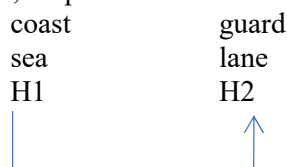
This example describes the structure of single-word Coast guard terms, which consist of one term element. Single-element terms are the most concise and effective form for conveying basic concepts.

4.1.3.2. Structural model of Coast guard terms composed of 2 elements

a. Compound words

Model 2: H1 + H2 Example: coast + guard, sea + lane

Model 2 describes the structure of compound terms consisting of two elements. In this model, two free morphemes combine to create a new concept, often Noun + Noun (N + N), where H1 modifies H2. For example: Coast guard, seaport.



b. Derivative words

Model 3: H1 + H2 (H2 is Suffix) Example: coast + al, legal + ize

Model 3 describes the structure of derivative terms with a suffix. The suffix (H2) is used to change the word class of the root (H1), such as converting a noun/verb into an Adjective (coastal) or vice-versa, serving the purpose of nominalization.



Model 4: H1 + H2 (H1 is Prefix) Example: anti + sub, multi + purpose

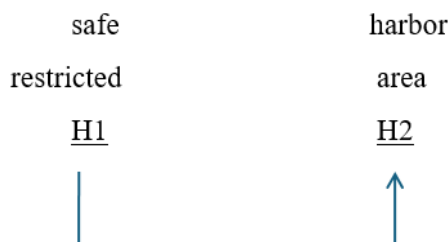
Model 4 describes the structure of derivative terms with a prefix. The prefix (H1) is added to the root word (H2) to refine the meaning, adding senses like opposition (anti-), quantity (multi-), or position (sub-). For example: antisubmarine, multipurpose.



c. Nominal phrases

Model 5: H1 + H2 Example: safe + harbor, restricted + area

Model 5 describes the structure of nominal phrases consisting of two terms elements. This is typically an (Adj + N) or (N + N) combination used to refine the core concept with a single modifier. For example: restricted areas, navigational hazards.

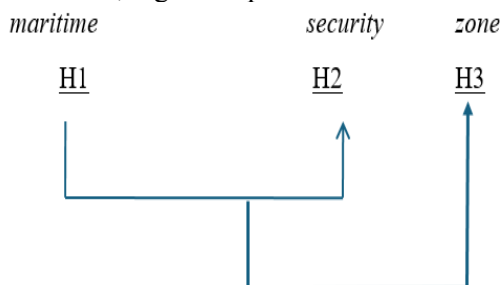


4.1.3.3. Structural Model of Coast guard terms composed of 3 elements

a. Compound words

Model 6: H1 + H2 + H3 Example: maritime + security + zone, long + range + patrol

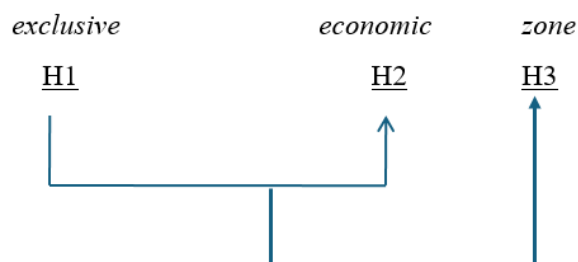
Model 6 describes the structure of compound terms consisting of three elements. This model is used to package more complex information into a single lexical unit, enhancing the precision of the designation. For example: air-sea rescue, high seas patrol.



b. Nominal phrases

Model 7: H1 + H2 + H3 Example: exclusive + economic + zone, vessel + traffic + service

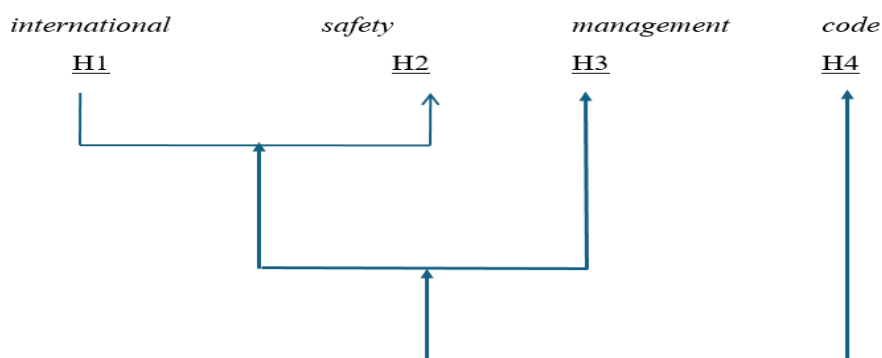
Model 7 describes the structure of nominal phrases consisting of three terms elements. This is the most common nominal phrase model, achieving an optimal balance between legal precision and conciseness. For example: exclusive economic zone, vessel traffic service.



4.1.3.4. Structural Model of Coast Guard terms composed of 4 elements

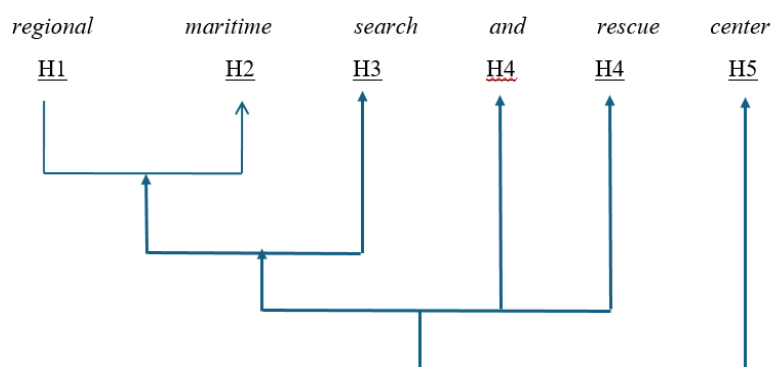
Model 8: H1 + H2 + H3 + H4 Example: international + safety + management + code

Model 8 describes the structure of nominal phrases consisting of four terms elements. This model represents high information density terms, often naming international regulatory documents or multi-sectoral operations that require non-abbreviated, precise designation. For example: international safety management code, port state control inspection.



4.1.3.5. Structural Model of Coast Guard terms composed of 5 Elements

Model 9: H1 + H2 + H3 + H4 + H5 Example: regional + maritime + search + and + rescue + center



Model 9 describes the structure of nominal phrases consisting of five terms elements. This model represents the maximum structural complexity in the surveyed corpus. Its existence proves the need to simultaneously integrate multiple parameters (scope, domain, function, location) into a single designation to create hyper complex terms (hyper complex terms), serving the demand for absolute accuracy by international organizations.

4.2. Discussion

The study confirms that the English Coast guard terms constitute a highly specialized and systematically organized Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), with structural characteristics maximally serving the need for absolute accuracy in international legal and maritime operational environments.

The most important conclusions are:

The term structure reaches a maximum of five elements, primarily in the form of complex nominal phrases. This maximum length is not arbitrary but is a grammatical necessity to fully integrate technical and legal parameters into a single conceptual unit, ensuring maximum differentiation in the lexicon.

The entire system adheres to the principle of nominalization. Nouns overwhelmingly dominate every model (single words, compounds, nominal phrases), confirming the primary goal is to designate static entities, systems, and rules within this domain.

The terms are effectively built upon a Main-Subordinate structure model. This model allows for efficient information condensation, where the main element carries the core concept, and preceding subordinate elements sequentially add details regarding scope, function, or characteristics (e.g., *regional maritime search and rescue center*).

While minor in quantity, Latin and Greek roots (in the form of affixes) play an essential functional role in creating highly technical and legal terms (*navigable, antisubmarine*), ensuring the specialized language is compatible with international conventions and standards.

In summary, the complex structure of English Coast guard terms evidences a continuous effort to achieve unambiguity and systematicity a vital scientific foundation for standardizing terms and enhancing the effectiveness of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training for the force.

5. Conclusion

The research confirms that the English Coast Guard terms is a tightly organized system designed to meet the demands for absolute accuracy and unambiguity. The existence of a term structure up to five elements is evidence of the requirement for maximum differentiation in international legal texts. This complex structure is the linguistic mechanism for fully integrating multiple parameters into a single conceptual unit. The system fully adheres to the nominalization principle. Compounding and nominal phrases are the most productive mechanisms. Nouns are the dominant word class in all models, reflecting the static and conceptualized nature of the domain.

The use of Latin and Greek roots plays an essential role in creating terms with high technical and academic precision, ensuring compatibility and necessary semantic accuracy with international conventions.

The application of the main-subordinate structure model ensures high conciseness and systematicity. This model allows for effective information condensation, optimizing the term formation process and operational information handling. These findings provide a solid scientific basis for terminology standardization and are particularly important for optimizing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training for the Coast guard force.

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Cấu tạo thuật ngữ Cảnh sát biển trong tiếng Anh

Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này phân tích đặc điểm cấu tạo của thuật ngữ chuyên ngành Cảnh sát biển trong tiếng Anh dựa trên 1.900 thuật ngữ từ các văn bản nghiệp vụ và Công ước Liên Hợp Quốc về Luật Biển (UNCLOS, 1982). Nghiên cứu này áp dụng phương pháp phân tích thành tố trực tiếp (Immediate Constituent – IC Analysis) và lý thuyết ngôn ngữ học cấu trúc, từ đó xem xét số lượng thành tố, loại từ và phương thức cấu tạo thuật ngữ như từ ghép, từ phái sinh và cụm danh ngữ... Kết quả cho thấy danh hóa (nominalization) là nguyên tắc chi phối toàn bộ hệ thống; danh từ chiếm ưu thế trong mọi kiểu cấu trúc. Các phương thức hình thành phổ biến nhất trong nghiên cứu này gồm: từ ghép (51,35%), cụm danh ngữ (18,54%) và từ phái sinh (5,67%). Độ dài cấu trúc tối đa đạt tới năm thành tố, chủ yếu dùng để biểu đạt các khái niệm pháp lý, kỹ thuật phức tạp, đảm bảo tính cô đọng, hệ thống và chính xác. Hệ thống thuật ngữ Cảnh sát biển tiếng Anh thể hiện tính chuyên biệt, chuẩn hóa cao, đáp ứng yêu cầu chính xác và minh bạch trong lĩnh vực hàng hải quốc tế, đồng thời cung cấp cơ sở ngôn ngữ học vững chắc cho chuẩn hóa thuật ngữ và giảng dạy tiếng Anh chuyên ngành (ESP).

Từ khóa: Đặc điểm cấu trúc; thuật ngữ Cảnh sát biển; tiếng Anh; phân tích thành tố; mô hình cấu trúc.