English Language: Growth of Vocabulary

Ms. Rajarajeswari. M	**Ms. Mohana .A**
Assistant Professor	Head of the Department
Department of Science and Humanities	Department of English
Rajiv Gandhi College of Engineering & Technology	Jazan University
Kirumampakkam, Puducherry, India	Gizan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Abstract: *The paper attempts to bring out the importance of vocabulary in the seventeenth century. The growth of English vocabulary has played a vital role because every year new words appear, while others extend or change their meaning.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

By the middle of the seventeenth century English Language had more or less assumed its present form so far as grammar, spelling and pronunciation are concerned. From the Restoration onwards the chief developments have been in the direction of an enlargement of the vocabulary on the one hand and changes in the meaning of words on the other. As knowledge grows, so language grows with it.

The English language is the richest of all the languages and has the most extensive vocabulary. New words have entered and enlarged the vocabulary of English. Dr. Johnson's Dictionary of 1755 contains some 48,000 entries while the 20th century Oxford Dictionary lists more than four hundred thousand words. The extent of our individual vocabularies probably varies considerably from person to person. It has been estimated that Shakespeare used about twenty thousand words and Milton eight thousand, but in both cases, of course, the figures are deceptive. This is partly due to historic factors, partly to the genius of the language and its readiness to absorb words from foreign tongues, or to make new ones where existing terms are not adequate. The growth of English vocabulary has taken place mainly in the following ways. They are

i) Imitation or Onomatopoeia.
ii) An Older word is given a new significance or its meaning is extended.
iii) A word which is normally one part of speech is used as another.
iv) Addition of Suffixes or Prefixes.
v) Abbreviation.
vi) Syncopation.
vii) Telescoping.
viii) Met analysis.
ix) Portmanteau Words.
x) Words Formed from Initials.
xi) Back-Formation.
xii) Corruption or Misunderstanding.
xiii) False Etymology.
xiv) Slang term entering literary Vocabulary
xv) Words derived from Proper Nouns.
xvi) Two words combined to form one word.
xvii) Conscious and Deliberate Coinages.
xviii) Words taken from foreign languages.
xix) Freak Formation.

i) Imitation or Onomatopoeia.

This perhaps one of the oldest, is also the crudest, methods of word-making. A number of words in our vocabulary today, especially those, which describe some kind of sound, are obviously imitative or onomatopoeic in character. The most representative examples are: bang, pop, buzz, click, hiss, giggle, etc. The name of the cuckoo is clearly an attempt to represent its distinctive call and it is generally accepted that the Latin barbarous, from which it is derived our own word barbarian, was in its origins, a verbal imitation of the uncouth and unintelligible babbling of foreign tribes.

The word slithery has a slippery suggestion: words like blow, blast, bloat, bladder, suggests inflation, by the inflation of the cheek when we pronounce the words. A large number of words suggesting stability begin with the combination of st as in stop, stay, station, still, stand. But the fact that onomatopoeia can be detected in a number of cases shows that in the past it has been one of the principles underlying word-making.

ii) An Older word is given a new significance or its meaning is extended.

This method has been very extensively used in vocabulary building. Example: 1. The word literary now means belonging to learning or pertaining to literature. Yet Dr. Johnson's Dictionary does not explain the word in this sense. At that time, it was used to mean alphabetical.

Example: 2. The word manufacture simply means to make by hand. But in modern usage, it means its opposite now manufacture means factory – made as opposed to handmade article. Extension of meaning is another way in which vocabulary has been enriched. Take the word, for example board. This most common every day word originally meant a plank of wood. Now its meaning has been extended to mean i) a table ii) the food served on a table as in the expression to pay for directors. iii) A group of people to sit around the table as in board of directors. iv) A smooth wooden surface as in notice board, black board. v) The deck of a ship. vi) Then, there are the various meanings of the verb to board, as in boarding a train, ship or a plane.

iii) A word which is normally one part of speech is used as another.

It is one of the characteristics of the English language that it is possible to use the same word as noun, verb, adjective and many other parts of speech.

Example: 1.The Noun Park means an open place for keeping cars. From this noun is coined the verb to park meaning to drive a car to the car-park.
Example: 2. From the Noun pocket we have the verb to pocket.
Example: 3.Similar to the above examples, we elbow through a crowd, eye a person with suspicion, we stomach insults, we face danger and so on.
Sometimes an adjective gains the sense of a noun by the omission of the substantive which is originally qualified.
> Example: 1 Submarine meaning a submarine vessel or a submarine boat.
> Example: 2. The noun wireless means wireless telegraphy.

iv) Addition of Suffixes or Prefixes.

This is a very ancient method of word formation, to be found in almost every language. Here, a simple root word is taken and a suffix is added to it.

Example:

> -dom as in kingdom, freedom.
> -ship as in workship, fellowship.
> -less as in careless, moneyless.
> -y as in healthy, sticky.
> -ish as in foolish, clownish.
> -ee as in employee, addressee.
> -en as in lengthen, shorten.
> In the present, modern age prefixes are used more intensively than suffixes.
> Example:
> Ambi- as in ambivalent, ambidextrous.

Pre- as in premature, pre-Raphaelite.
Post- as in postgraduate.
Sub- as in submarine, subzero.
Inter- as in international, interracial.
Extra – as in extraordinary, extracurricular.
Super- as in supersonic, superfast.

Another way in which words can be multiplied is by the addition of various prefixes to a root word. Sometime this possibility is almost unlimited.

Example: from the simple Latin root *vert* meaning to turn, we get.

Prefix   Root Word

Con
in
re   Vert
di
per
sub

v) Abbreviation.

A long word is shortened by abbreviating it. After some period, the abbreviation itself becomes a new word and the full form is no more used.

Zoo for zoological garden.
Bus for omnibus.
Exam for Examination.
Maths for Mathematics.
Photo for photograph.
Bike for bicycle.
Pram for perambulator.

Words like exam, lab, and maths are now used in conversation and informal writing, while their full forms, examination, laboratory, mathematics are used in formal context.

There are a number of commonly used words, which we do not regard as abbreviations though they once had longer, cumbersome forms.

Examples: Mob from the Latin mobile vulgus meaning fickle crowd.
Cab from the French cabriolet.
Taxi from French Taxi metre-cabriolet.
Fan from fanatic.
Piano from pianoforte.
Cinema from Cinematograph.

Another type of abbreviation is that a lengthy and cumbersome Latin phrase is clipped so that only one or two words remain.

Example:
Quorum (of whom)
Affidavit (he has sworn)
Veto (I forbid)
Status quo (the state existing before)

The tendency to abbreviate is very old natural and universal. It has always been opposed by pursuits. Its continued use over a long period makes it enter the vocabulary of language.

vi) Syncopation.

This is a particular form of shortening or abbreviation.

Example: *pram*. Its original form was *perambulator*. It was syncopated to perambulator and then abbreviated to pram. In syncopation, a vowel is removed from a word and the consonants on either side are then run together. As a result one syllable is lost. Other examples are

Once which was originally ones
Else which was originally elles
all pronounced originally as disyllables.
Likewise some past participles like

> Born
> Worn
> Shorn
> Forlorn

are syncopated forms. At one time they had the terminal ending –en.

vii) Telescoping.

This process is similar to syncopation, but here two words are combined into one.
Example:
> *to don* was originally *to do on*.
> *to doff* was originally *to do off*.

More recent examples are: *pinafore* from *pin+ afore*.
> *Overall* from *over + all*

viii) Met analysis.

It means re-analysis and this process is close to telescoping. In this case, the consonant at the end of the word gets attached to the vowel at the beginning of the next word. So, by re-analysis, a new combination is formed.
Example: The word nickname it was originally ick name, ick is an old word meaning also. Therefore an ickname meant an also name, that is a name given to a person in addition to his real name. In course of time, the final n of an got attached to the vowel of the following word.
Example:
> *A nickname* was evolved from *an ickname*.
> *A newt* was evolved from *an ewt*.
> *Tawdry* was evolved from *saint Audry*.

Sometimes, this process works in the reverse. That is, the article a takes as n from the noun that follows. Thus we have an orange from a norange.
> *an umpire* from *a numpire*
> *an apron* from *a napron*
> *an augur* from *a nauger*
> *an adder* from *a nadder*.

ix) Portmanteau Words.

Here, part of a word is combined with another word to form a new word. This newly formed word contains both the ideas behind the original terms.

Examples:
> *Tragic-comedy* from *Tragedy and comedy*.
> *Melodrama* from *Melody and drama*.
> *Smog* from *smoke and fog*.

x) Words Formed from Initials.

In some cases, initial letters are used more commonly than the original full forms of words. As a result, the initials are regarded as words in themselves. Thus we speak of a B.A or M.A rather than Bachelor of Arts or Masters of Art, or M.P or C.I.D, many English speakers may not even know the full forms.

Some times, the separate initials letters are combined to form words, by dropping the full-stop marks as in UNESCO, NATO, RADAR, and LASER.

xi) Back-Formation.

This is another means by which new words have come into being. Most back formations are the result of a misunderstanding.

For example in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was an adverb *groveling* meaning *in a pathetic manner or on the ground*. Thus one would say *he lay groveling in the dust* where *groveling* is an adverb of manner. In course of time, the termination –ing was mistaken to be a present participle. So, erroneously, the adverb was taken for the present participle. In the next step, the infinitive *to grovel* was formed. Through a totally mistaken idea, a new verb was added to the English language.

In the same way the verb to sidle is a back formation from the adverb sidling, and the nouns beggar, hawker, editor by back –formation gave rise to *verbs to beg, to hawk, to edit*. Most agent nouns are formed from the verb adding –er or –or (worker, singer, gambler etc) but here the process has worked in the opposite direction.

xii) Corruption or Misunderstanding.

Some times new words are formed by corruption or through misunderstanding. For example, the word *whitsun* (the 7th day after easter) came into existence through a corruption. It refers to the Sunday following Easter. It refers to the festival, which celebrates the decent of the Holy Spirit. The word *whitsun* originated Whitsunday which meant white Sunday. On that day, all converts to Christianity wore white robes, as a symbol of purification. Then Metanalysis, whit Sunday was transformed *to whitsun* day. Later on, the analogy of this came *whitsun week*, *whitsun tide*, *whitsun Sunday*, and even whitsun Monday, which is a contradiction in terms.

In the same way *goodbye* is a garbled form of *God be with ye*.

xiii) False Etymology.

There are a certain number of words in the English language which have attained their present forms or their present-day usage, through mistaken notions regarding their etymology.

Example:1
Salt-cellar (a vessel which holds salt) at one time, a vessel to hold salt was named a saler (from the Latin word sal= salt). Then quite unnecessarily, it was called a salt-saler. Finally, it became "salt-cellar".

iv) Slang term entering literary Vocabulary

A number of words used today as standard, respectable English, were once slang terms, regarded as low or vulgar. The following words now used in formal English were slang words up to the 17th century.

Example:
       Chap originally meant (a dealer in stolen goods)
       Trip originally meant (a short voyage)
       Bet originally meant (wager)

Kidnap was once a slang word. Its meaning was restricted to kid nabbing or child stealing. This word is now Standard English meaning *to abduct*.

Slang is mainly the creation of those who disregard convention and want novelty of expression. They believe that it shows independence and originality. It is the favorite of the very young, the very low and the very high. With the passage of time, a word ceases to be slang and becomes good English. When it began to be used by respected writers and by normally educated people a slang gains acceptance as a formal word.

xv) Words derived from Proper Nouns.

A good number of words entered English language, which are derived from Personal Names. The word utopian comes from Thomas Moore's utopia and the word Lilliputian comes from Swift's ***Gulliver's Travels***. Many garments have taken their names of those who first used them or introduced to the public. The word teddy bear from the American president Theodore Roosevelt. The word *to lynch* comes from Judge Lynch of the United States who dispensed justice in a somewhat summary manner.

A number of words were derived from place names, to denote products which originally came from that place.

Example:

       Calico from Calicut

       Muslin from Mosul

       Millinery from Milan

xvi) Two words combined to form one word.

This is not quite the same process as syncopation, mentioned earlier in with the difference that no syllable is lost. Words like *Blackbird, weekday, Goldfish* etc., are quite clearly just a combination of two words. Other examples are

       Daisy from days eye.

       Bonafire from Bona fire

       Woman from wifman.

xvii) Conscious and Deliberate Coinages.

When a new invention or discovery is made there not only arises the necessity of finding a name for it but also this new discovery brings a train of fresh ideas and conceptions, so that a need is felt for words to express them. Thus, the vocabulary is enlarged by the addition of coinages.

Example: *Aeroplane*. Once it was known as a flying machine and only later the name *Aeroplane* for the machine was found. Then came the difficulty of finding a name for the person who flew it. So, the term *aviator* was coined (from the Latin root avis=bird). Then this was replaced by airman. From this we have *aircraft, airship, airlines, airport* and so on.

xviii) Words taken from foreign languages.

By its very nature English borrows freely from other languages when they can fill a gap, supply a need or when a word is more expressive than the corresponding English term.

Example: *Circus, terminus, specimen* from Greek. *Radius, vacuum, tractor* from Latin. *Café, Blouse* from French.

English has borrowed from practically every language in the world. The number and range of such words are unlimited. In this respect English stands in contrast to a language like German, this goes to its own root while coining a new word.

xix) Freak Formation.

Certain words came into existence as a result of Freak-Formation.

Example: *Teetotaller.*

Teetotaller (one who abstains from alcohol). This word originated as a result of stammering by an anti-alcohol advocate. He stammered while pronouncing the expression total abstainer and thus the word *Teetotaller* was formed.

2. CONCLUSION

We have now distinguished nineteen chief ways in which words are formed or added to the language. But, it may be asked, how these words come to be introduced, what the motive is behind the enlargement or extension of the vocabulary, and what factors determine whether such additions become a permanent part of the language or live for a while only and then become obsolete. In general it may be said that a new word is called forth by a need for it or a consciousness that no existing word is really adequate to fill that need: a new idea or conception is to be expressed, new institutions or new social developments and tendencies have to be described and distinguished: new inventions or newly adopted products, fashions etc., depends very largely upon the performance of the objects or the ideas they are used to describe.

Political and social developments, as well as religious controversies, have been the occasion for the introduction of numerous words into the language; and it is not always possible to trace them to any one person.

No living language is ever static; new words are constantly being added. Amongst those that have appeared in our own language since the outbreak of war in 1939. For example, *automation, beatnik, the*

gambling game, cold war, the iron curtain, paratrooper and recap. There is also a growing practice of prefixing *'mini'* from *'miniature'* to an already existent noun to signify a small version of the thing or article in question. Example: *minibus, minicar, minicab.* Every year new words appear, while others extend or change their meaning.

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