

## Word Formation Processes in English: Some Underlying Principles

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### ABSTRACT:

*Language is a means of communication. One of the distinctive properties of human language is 'creativity' by which we mean the ability of native speaker of language to produce and understand new forms in their language. As far as the history of English language is concerned from the Restoration onwards the chief developments have been in the direction of an enlargement of the vocabulary on the one hand and change in meaning of words on the other. The one is an inevitable outcome of the need to express new ideas, new perceptions and new shades of meaning or to give names to new inventions and new discoveries. Though creativity is most apparent when it comes to sentence formation, it is also manifest in our lexical knowledge where new words are added to our mental lexicon regularly.*

*As knowledge grows; so language grows with it. English has always shown its readiness to absorb words from foreign languages and to coin new words when existing terms are not adequate. New words have come into English language and the vocabulary has been enlarged in a number of ways. The process of borrowing words from other languages is not the only way by which vocabulary is enriched. The linguistic resources are also increased by the formation of new words.*

### INTRODUCTION:

Today, the term 'Word Formation' does not have a clear cut universally accepted usage. It is sometimes referred to all the processes connected with changing the word form. i.e. affixation which is a matter of morphology. In its wider sense word formation denotes the process of creating new lexical units. It is a matter of dispute whether a blending is still a morphological change or making a new word. The present paper focuses on some of the basic principles underlying word-formation processes and the ways by which vocabulary is enlarged / enriched.

- **By Imitation or Onomatopoeia:** This is one of the oldest; if also the crudest methods of word making which has been one of the most important sources of enlargement of vocabulary. A number of words in our vocabulary today, especially those which describe some kind of sound are obviously imitative in character. A few representative ones are bang, pop, buzz, click, whizz, rumble, mumble, hiss, giggle etc. The name of the bird

'Cuckoo' is clearly an attempt to represent its distinctive call. The word 'slither' has a slippery suggestion. The words awe and awful remind us of the exclamation ooh! Denoting surprise and wonder. Thus, it is apparent that imitation has been one of the principles underlying word making.

- **An older word is given a new significance or meaning is extended:** This is a method which has been used so extensively that it cannot be discussed adequately here. Many words in English have not always had the same meaning that they bear today. Countless words in English have changed or modified their meaning. A few examples can be discussed here. If we look up the meaning of the word "Literary" in any dictionary, we shall probably find that the first definition runs something like connected with literature, belonging to letters or learning appertaining to literature. Yet Johnson's dictionary does not record it in this sense at all. In his day, it was not a word that was much used and when it was, it meant "alphabetical" Again we all know the meaning of a word 'pedant' is –one who is too concerned with small details or rules. But to Shakespeare, it meant a schoolmaster. Perhaps a better example is the verb 'to manufacture' which means to make by hand. But modern usage nearly always employs it with the opposite meaning – to make goods in large quantities using machinery. A manufactured article and hand-made article are entirely different things. Wars and periods of conflict are also responsible for a change or extension of meaning. The term 'blackout' was a theatrical term to describe the darkening of the stage. A glance through a dictionary at a few common everyday words like bar, board, character will suffice to show how the resources of the language have been augmented by the application of this principle.
- **A word which is normally one part of speech is used as another (conversion) :** 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. A change in the function of a word as for example when a noun comes to be used as a verb (without any reduction) is generally known as 'conversion'. The most frequent interchange is possibly that between nouns and verbs. Thus from the noun 'park' –an open space where car may be left, is coined the verb 'to park' and the noun 'pocket' gives us the verb 'to pocket'. A number of nouns such as bottle, butter, chair and vacation have come to be used through this process as verbs. 'But' for instance is normally a conjunction. However, when we say, 'But me not buts' we use the word as a verb and noun respectively. The nouns signifying

the principal parts of the body can nearly all be used as verbs. We can head a ball, We can face the danger, We can elbow or shoulder our way through the crowd. We can eye a person with suspicion. We can hand the porter a tip etc. Verbs also become adjectives as in see-through material or a stand up comedian. Adjectives like dirty and empty can become the verbs to dirty and to empty respectively.

- **Words derived from proper names:** Even if we exclude scientific and technical terms, there are number of words in English which are derived from proper or personal names. Thomas More gave us 'Utopia' and the adjective 'Utopian' as a derivative. From Swift came Lilliput and Lilliputian. The word 'Gamp' as a synonym for umbrella is a legacy of Dickens' well known character Mrs. Gamp. However, it is to be noted that this word is not used now a days. New words based on the names of a person or place are called eponyms. Some eponyms are technical terms based on the names of those who first discovered or invented things such as Fahrenheit (from Gabriel Fahrenheit (German), Volt (Italian Alessandro Volta), Watt (Scott – James Watt). Garments particularly seems to have borrowed the name of those who first wore them or introduced them to the public. Thus we have Norfolk jackets, Mackintoshes, Cardigans, Wellingtons, Bloomers and Bowlers – the last mentioned being named after a certain Mr. Bowler. Sandwiches took their name from one of the Earl of Sandwich who first introduced them as a convenient form of refreshment for his card parties. 'Dahlia' perpetuates the name of the Swedish botanist Dahl by whom it was first cultivated.

Captain Boycott was an agent for the Irish estates of a certain English peer in 1880. He became so unpopular on account of his harsh treatment of the tenants that an organised strike was planned against him and they finally removed him. This mode of the treatment became known as a boycott after the person upon whom it was first successfully practised. This is how the verb to boycott was coined. A number of words of this type are still unexplained and will probably always remain so. However, this has been one of the most frequent sources of enlargement of vocabulary.

- **Abbreviation:** This has been one of the basic principles underlying some word formation processes. The tendency to abbreviate is a normal an old and a universal one. At precisely what stage of its history an abbreviation becomes recognised as a word, it is not easy to state. Presumably when the full form ceases to be used in ordinary writing and speech.

There are some word formation processes i.e. clipping, blending, backformation and acronymy corresponding to the principle of abbreviation.

➤ **Clipping:** It consists in the reduction of a word to one of its parts. It is also known as shortening. This occurs when a word of more than one syllable. i.e. 'facsimile' is reduced to shorter form 'fax'.

❖ **Back clipping (Apocopation) :** Back clipping or apocopation is the most common type in which the beginning is retained. **Examples are:** *Ad* (advertisement), *gas* (gasoline), *cable* (cablegram), *pop* (popular concert) *maths* (mathematics), *exam* (examination), *gym* (gymnastics, gymnasium), *memo* (memorandum), *pub* (public house), *photo* (photograph) etc. Some of the words like lab, maths and exam have not yet received literary recognition. The full forms are still frequently used in speech and always used in writing. But in another generation, they may be considered pedantic. 'Zoo' of the zoological garden is now accepted as good colloquial term in speech and in writing as well.

❖ **Fore clipping (Aphaeresis):** It retains the final part. i.e. phone (telephone), coon (raccoon), varsity (university), chute (parachute), gator (alligator) etc.

❖ **Middle clipping (Syncope) :** In middle clipping or syncope, the middle part is retained. i.e. flu (influenza), jams (pyjamas), tec (detective) etc.

There are number of words employed in everyday speech which we regard as good old English words but actually are reduced forms. Mob is a shortening of the Latin phrase 'mobile vulgus'. 'cab' comes from the French 'cabriolet'. The colloquial 'chap' is an abbreviation of 'chapman'; 'miss' comes from 'mistress', 'hussy' from 'housewife', 'wig' was originally 'periwig', fan of (fanatic), piano of (pianoforte) etc. It is difficult to give a full list of words which are actually clipped or shortened. Each section of community of course has its own abbreviations which constitutes a kind of jargon. The tendency to abbreviate is a natural, an old and universal one and it has always been opposed by the purists. According to them, it was a sign of degeneracy.

➤ **Blending:** When part of one word is combined with part of another in order to form a new word carrying with it, the ideas behind both is called blending. 'Melodrama' comes from melody and drama. 'Bit' is a combination of binary and digit. Brunch is a combination of breakfast and lunch. To describe the mixing of language, some people

talk about –Hinglish, Spanglish etc. Some commonly used examples of blending are motel (motor + hotel), telecast (television + broadcast), Chunnel (channel + tunnel), infotainment (information + entertainment), simulcast (simultaneous + broadcast), smog (smoke + fog) etc.

- **Acronyms:** Acronyms are words manufactured from initials. In certain cases initials have become more commonly used than the actual words. Today, we use the abbreviations such as B.A., M.A., C.D., V.C.R., frequently in speech and writing. Some acronyms are pronounced as new single word initials as in NATO, NASA, UNESCO. They have kept their initial letters. Some of the acronyms simply become everyday terms i.e. full fledged words:

**LASER :** Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation

**RADAR :** Radio Detection and Ranging

**SCUBA :** Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus

- **Borrowing:** One of the most common sources of new words in English is the process simply labelled borrowing i.e. the taking over of words from other languages. English has borrowed from particularly every language under the sun! It should be noted that the other languages have also borrowed words from English. The classical tongues have always proved a hunting ground for a word coiner. Scientists and inventors particularly have drawn upon them. A special type of borrowing is described as loan translation or calque. Throughout its history English has adopted a vast number of words from other languages including – oxygen, hydrogen, biology (Greek), radiator manicure (Latin), Lilac (Persian), piano (Italian), tycoon (Japanese), yogurt (Turkish), croissant (French), sofa (Arabic) etc.
- **By the addition of prefix and suffix (Derivation) :** This is a very ancient method of word formation to be found in almost every language. A study of the affixes used by any particular age can to some extent throw light upon its general character and temperament. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was very fond of the ending 'esque'- picaresque, romanesque, picturesque etc. The various 'isms' of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reflect its obsession with theory and doctrine i.e. communism, nationalism, marxism etc.

The prevalence of the prefix 'inter' in our own age - international, intercollegiate, inter-racial, inter-disciplinary indicates a tendency to develop intellectually narrowing boundaries and look towards wider horizons.

- **Different words are combined (compounding) :** Words like weekday, goldfish, blackbird, waterproof etc are clearly a combination of two different words. This is a very common principle underlying the word formation process technically known as compounding. Examples are bookcase, goldfish, textbook, sunburn, doorknob etc. All these examples are nouns but we can create compound adjectives: good-looking, low-paid, and compound of adjectives (fast) plus noun (food) as in a fast-food restaurant or a full time job. This principle of combining has been very productive source of new terms in English.
- **Multiple processes:** The above mentioned principles and word formation processes are the most frequent and important in the English language, but it is rarely the case that only one process occurs in one word. For example- the term 'deli' seems to have become a common American English expression via a process of first borrowing from delicatessen from German and then clipping that borrowed form. Words can be loaned and then back formed later on gaining an affix. There are practically no boundaries to these processes other than human ingenuity.

**Conclusion:** In this paper different word formation processes and the principles underlying them are explained. An attempt has been made to analyse some of the ways and methods by which vocabulary is enriched.

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