

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE : THE PROCESS OF CREATING NEW VOCABULARY FROM EXISTING ONES

KAMISAH HJ ARIFFIN

Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pahang, 26400 Bandar Jengka, Pahang

ABSTRACT

When Julius Caesar landed in Britain over two thousand years ago, the English Language did not exist (McRum et al, 1992). At present, the contrast is remarkably extraordinary. This language is used by at least 750 million people, and half of those speak it as a mother tongue. On top of that, English is claimed to be the richest in vocabulary. The Oxford English Dictionary lists about 500,000 words, and a further half-million technical and scientific terms remain uncatalogued. However, the development process of the language has not happened in a vacuum. This paper examines the processes of creating new words in the English vocabulary.

INTRODUCTION

English has the largest vocabulary among other languages in the world, and due to the mobility of people the vocabulary keeps on expanding. Often, new words are created to suit and cater for the needs of people. However, some of the words created are not totally new words. As put forward by Bloomfield (1933), "Language, like other important patterns of human behaviour, slowly but constantly evolves from older forms to newer ones". From the etymological point of view, some words did exist before the new forms take place and become popular.

According to The Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories, word creation can be traced back to the conquest and the settlement of Britain by the Germanic Tribes in the 5th Century. Words were created for survival of these tribes. The words were a compromise between their own language and the 'new' language. In addition, words were created for economical reasons. For example, instead of saying *Harald, the son of Erik*, it was shortened and simplified into *Harald Erikson*. Thus, surnames like *Jackson*, and *Johnson* were coined.

The Modern English era, or the renaissance has added something like ten thousand to twelve thousand new words to the English lexicon. This is due to the scientific revolution of which new discoveries and new invention needing new description. In addition, the adaptation to the culture of people that the English became acquainted with has resulted in the creation of new vocabulary. The following table well illustrates this point :

ORIGINS	FIELD	EXAMPLES
French	Bureaucracy	<i>government</i>
Spanish	Conflicts	<i>desperado</i>
Italian	Architecture	<i>cupola</i>
Low German	Seafaring	<i>smuggle</i>

THE PROCESS OF CREATING THE NEW VOCABULARY

A study of new words creation of a period of fifty years, 1941 – 1991 (Algeo, 1991) finds that there are several significant processes of word making :

TYPE	%
Compounding	40
Affixation	28
Shifting	17
Shortening	8
Blending	5
Borrowing	2
Creating	<.5

Compounding

Most words from the English word stock have been made through the process of combining words. One of the processes in combining is called compounding, in which two or more words are put together to form a new word with a meaning in some way different from the meaning of the individual words uncombined. For example, a *blackboard* is not the same thing as a *black board*. There are three ways of how compound words are spelled : solid (*hatchback*), hyphenated (*laid-back*) and open (*call back*).

This process of word creation has been common from earliest times. For example, in the old English, the following words were formed :

Words	Meaning
<i>bliðheort</i>	Blithe heart
<i>eaxlgestella</i>	Shoulder companion (comrade)
<i>breostnet</i>	Breast-net
<i>learnungchict</i>	Learning retainer (knight)
<i>fullyfyllan</i>	To fulfil

Some common examples of the Modern English compound words are :

Words	Meaning
Bungee jumping	The sport of jumping from a height with elastic cords around the feet to break the fall.
<i>Hot-button issue</i>	A political issue with strong emotional implications
<i>Sandwich generation</i>	Person responsible for the care of both children and parents.
<i>Peace dividend</i>	Budgetary savings from reduced military spending.
<i>Material girl</i>	A young woman concerned primarily with material benefits.
<i>Win-win situation</i>	Advantageous to both sides in a negotiation.

There are some confusions, however, as far as the writing and spelling of the compound words are concerned. There has been inconsistency of using the solid, hyphenated, and open ways of spelling. What makes it even complicated is, the meaning may well be different. The following illustrates this:

<i>Hotbed</i>	-	place that encourages rapid growth
<i>Hot bed</i>	-	warm sleeping place
<i>Highbrow</i>	-	intellectual
<i>High brow</i>	-	result of receding hair
<i>Blackball</i>	-	vote against
<i>Black ball</i>	-	ball coloured black
<i>Greenhouse</i>	-	heated structure for growing plants
<i>Greenhouse</i>	-	house painted green
<i>Makeup</i>	-	cosmetics
<i>Make up</i>	-	reconcile
<i>Headhunter</i>	-	savage
<i>Head hunter</i>	-	leader on a safari
<i>Loudspeaker</i>	-	sound amplifier
<i>Loud speaker</i>	-	noisy talker

Some compound words are not suspected compound words at all. This is called as amalgamated compound. The followings are examples of some amalgamated compound words from the Old English which are still commonly used in the present :

<i>As</i>	-	al (all) + swa (so)
<i>Garlic</i>	-	gar (spear) + leac (leek)
<i>Hussy</i>	-	hus (house) + wif (woman)
<i>Lord</i>	-	half (loaf) + weard (guardian)
<i>Marshall</i>	-	mearn (house) + scealc (servant)
<i>Nostril</i>	-	nosu (nose) + pyrel (hole)
<i>Sheriff</i>	-	scire (shire) + refa (reeve)

Some amalgamated compounds are proper names, such as place names and surnames. For example, *Boston* (Botulf's stone), *Sussex* (south plus Seaxe [Saxons]), *Norwich* (North plus wic [village]), and *Bewley* (beau [beautiful] plus lieu [place]).

Affixation

Another process of combining words is through affixation, that is, the use of prefixes and suffixes. These prefixes and suffixes, originated from the Old English have survived until today.

a. From Old English

Prefixes			Suffixes		
after_	out_	un_	_dom	_er	_hood
be_	under_	up_	_ish	_less	_ship
for_	with_	mis_	_some	_ster	_y

b. Affixes from other languages

GREEK			LATIN		
anti_	inter_	post_	_ese	_ician	_al
de_	multi_	pre_	_an	_or	_ana
dis_	neo_	pseudo_	_orium		
ex_	non_	sub_			

Modern affixes, or voguish affixes, as they are named, have become popular during certain periods. Furthermore, they have found their way into the word stock because of their economy in circumventing phrases. Thus, for saying *in respect of personality* and *in the manner of salary*, for example, the coinage of *personalitywise* and *salarywise* has been preferred instead.

Shifting Words to New Meaning

Because of its paucity of inflection, Modern English has facilitated a very prolific source of creating new words from the existing ones.

a. *Functional Shift*

The conversion of words from one grammatical function to another without changing the form is known as functional shift. Thus, nouns may function as verbs or vice versa, nouns may function as adjectives, and adjectives may be converted into verbs or vice versa :

Noun to Verb	Verb to Noun	Noun to Adjective
<i>Head</i> a committee	Take a <i>walk</i>	<i>Stone</i> wall
<i>Hand</i> in papers	Go for a <i>run</i>	<i>Head</i> office
<i>Foot</i> a bill	Go for a <i>drive</i>	

In addition, the combination of the parts of speech results in new words being formed. For example, the combination of verbs and prepositions give another meaning to the words. For instance, *put* and *up* combined give several meanings to the original meaning of the words on their own. Other examples are combinations like *keep up*, *break down*, *give in* and *take in*.

b. *Commonization*

Quite a large number of words in the English vocabulary are created from proper names through the process of communization, which is also a kind of functional shift in its sense. The most common example is the word *boycott* which was derived from the name of Captain Charles Cunningham Boycott (1832-97), who “because as a land agent, refused to accept rents at figures fixed by tenants, was the best-known victim of the policy of ostracization of the Irish Land League agitators” (in Pyles and Algeo, 1993 : 280).

Similarly, *sandwich* comes into the word stock from the fourth Earl of Sandwich (1718-92), “who was said to have spent twenty –hours at the gaming table with no other refreshment than slices of meat between slices of bread” (in Pyles and Algeo, 1993 : 282). *Pantaloon*, an old-fashioned name for trousers, is from Italian *pantalone*, the name of a silly senile Italian comedy who wore such clothing. Some other common words in this category are *bougainvillea*, *camellia*, *chauvinism*, *nicotine*, *volcano*, *Don Juan*, *odyssey*, *panic* and a myriad of others.

Shortening

a. *Clipped Forms*

Clipped forms are the shortening of the longer words, and of course have rapidly gained popularity and preference in use due to the economical reason. Some examples of the words being superseded :

Other abbreviated forms that are commonly used are *phone* (telephone), *zoo* (zoological garden), *flu* (influenza), *ad / advert* (advertisement), *car* (motorcar), *bio* (biography), *fax* (facsimile), *high tech* (high technology), *rehab* (rehabilitation) and *heli* (helicopter)

Word	Meaning	Clipped Form
Mobile vulgus	Movable, or fickle, common	Mob
Omnibus	people	Bus
Taximeter cabriolet	Motor vehicle for paying passengers	Taxi / Cab
Brassiere	Motor vehicle for paying passengers	Bra
	A shoulder strap	

b. *Initialisms*

This is an extreme kind of clipping, in which only the initial letters of the words are pronounced or used. This is called alphabetisms. Examples of such words are KO, YMCA, ASAP, BMW, OK and VIP.

c. *Aphetic Forms*

This kind of shortening involves sound change. It consists of only the syllables that carry the main stress, the unstressed ones being omitted. For example, 'scuse me (excuse me) and 'cause (because).

Blending words

This process of blending two existing words to create a new word can be traced back to the earliest time. For example, *flush* (*flash* plus *gush* [1548]), *twirl* (*twist* plus *whirl* [1598]), *dumbfound* (*dumb* plus *confound* [1653]) and *flurry* (*flutter* plus *hurry* [1698]).

Lewis Carroll's blend words, which he called portmanteau words, have found their way into the dictionary. Two of his popular creations are *chortle* (*chuckle* plus *snort*), and *galumph* (*gallop* plus *triumph*).

Some contemporary blend words that are widely used are *smog* (*smoke* plus *fog*), *motel* (*motor* plus *hotel*), *camporee* (*camp* plus *jamboree*) and *brunch* (*breakfast* plus *lunch*).

Creating

a. *Root Creations*

"It is unlikely that very many words have come into being during the historical period that have not been suggested in one way or another by previously existing words" (Pyles and Algeo, 1993 : 258). There is a small percentage of words created without any association with any existing words. One example is the word *Kodak*, invented by George Eastman in 1888, who claimed that the word was "a purely arbitrary combination of letters, not derived in whole or in part from any existing words" (in Pyles and Algeo, 1993 : 258). However, a further examination of this word reveals that this word may not be etymologyless after all. According to Eastman's biographer, there was a very slight association with his use of the letter *k*, as his mother's family name began with that letter.

Similarly, the word *nylon*, which is claimed as etymologyless may not be one. According to Context, a Du Pont company publication, there were many stages involved before the word *nylon* was coined. When the material was first developed, it was given the name *polyhexamethyleneadipamide*. However, this was not catchy enough a name that the company came up with *duprooh*, an acronym for "Du Pont pulls rabbit out of hat". Then, it was settled as *no-run*, an English expression for stockings that had no run, until it was pointed out that the stockings were made of the material which was not really run-proof. Thus, the spelling of that word was reversed into *nuron*, but it sounded like a nerve system. Hence, it was later modified into *nilon*. In order to prevent pronunciation like *nillon*, the company thus changed the spelling, hence, the word *nylon* is produced.

Other trade names that are created from existing words are *Vaseline*, which was formed from German *Wasser* 'water' and Greek *elaion* 'oil', *Kleenex* was produced from the word *clean*, and *Cutex* from *cuticle*.

b. *Echoic Words*

This kind of words is based on the sound produced. These words are called echoic or onomatopoeic and the examples are *bang*, *burp*, *splash*, *tinkle*, *ping* and *cuckoo*. Bloomfield (1933) distinguished these words as imitative of sound such as *meow*, *moo*, *bow-wow* and *vroom*, and symbolic, of which can illustrate the meaning more immediately than ordinary speech forms, and normally come in sets that rime like *bump*, *lump*, *clump*, *hump*, and alliterate such as *flick*, *flash*, *flip* and *flop*. Both the imitative and symbolic words usually show doubling.

c. *Ejaculations*

These words are actually imitations of words from vocal responses to emotional situations. The following table shows the words and their meaning representations:

Words	Meaning
<i>Ouch</i>	Mild pain
<i>Yep</i>	Yes
<i>Yum-Yum</i>	Pleasure in eating
<i>Uh-huh</i>	agreement
<i>Tsk-tsk</i>	Impatience or anger
<i>Ho-ho</i>	Santa clause is here
<i>Pooh-pooh</i>	disgust
<i>Pish-pshaw</i>	Disdain, contempt, impatience, irritation
<i>Pugh</i>	Disdainful sniff as reaction to a bad smell

CONCLUSION

It is important to know the processes of word creation as it can contribute better understanding of the evolution of the English Language, especially we now have the English vocabulary being localized.

Foreign English	Examples
Japlish (Japan)	Manshon (mansion) Aisu-kurimu (ice-cream) Esukareta (escalator)
Manglish (Malaysian)	Farmasi (pharmacy) Member (as in friend) Video (video)
Swinglish (Sweden)	Baj baj (bye bye) Tajt jeans (tight jeans)
Ecuador	Travoltarse (swinger – from John Travolta)

REFERENCES

- Algeo, J. 1991. *Fifty Years Among the New Words : A Dictionary of Neologisms, 1941-1991*. Cambridge University Press.
- Baugh, A.C. and Cable, T. 1993. *A History of the English Language*. Prentice Hall.
- Bloomfield, L. 1933. *Language*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Greenbaum, S. 1985. *The English Language Today*. Pergamon Press.
- McRum, R et al. 1992. *The Story of English*. Faber and Faber.
- Pyles, T. and Algeo, J. 1993. *The Origins and Development of the English Language*. 4th Ed. Harcourt Brace.
- (1997/1998) *A Brief History of English Lexicography* (On line)
Available : <http://angli02.kgw.tu-berlin.de/lexicography/b-history.html>
1998. *Etymology Terminology in the Merriam-Webster New Book of World Histories* (On line) Available : <http://www.m-w.com/whist/etyterm.htm>
1998. *The Origins of English in the Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories* (On line) Available : <http://www.m-w.com/whist/origeng.htm>