

APPREHENDING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ETYMOLOGY

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Annotation. In this article, the author gives information about the English language etymology and its importance in teaching foreign language.

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The inquiry must sometimes occur even to those not specially engaged in the study of language, by what steps does such and such a word come to have the meaning in which it is actually found, what is the earliest source to which it can be traced, and what are the cognate forms either in our own or in related languages. The answer to inquiries of such a nature constitutes what we look for in the etymology of a language. Etymology is still at the stage where an arbitrary theory is accepted as the basis of scientific explanation. It is supposed that all languages are developed from roots or skeletons of articulate sound. As a consequence, plethora of words, English words in particular, are incapable of being actually used in speech, until properly clothed in grammatical forms and identified the original root. In this article it will be provided the information about English etymology and words with interesting origins in examples assisting the students to comprehend the importance of etymology of words in order to use them correctly in their speech and grammatical activities. English has an extraordinarily large vocabulary, much larger than that of many other languages, because of its extensive contacts with other languages, because of the large numbers of people all over the world who have come to use it, and because of the increasingly manifold purposes for which it is used.

For languages with a long written history, etymologists make use of texts in these languages and texts about the languages to gather knowledge about how words were used during earlier periods of their history and when they entered the languages in question. Etymologists also apply the methods of comparative linguistics to reconstruct information about languages that are too old for any direct information to be available. Even though etymological research originally grew from the philological tradition, currently much etymological research is done on language families where little or no early documentation is available, such as Uralic and Austronesian. The word etymology is derived from the Greek word "etymologia", itself from "etymon", meaning "true sense", and the suffix -logia, denoting "the study of" In linguistics, the

term etymon is used to refer to a word or morpheme from which a later word is derived. For example, Latin *candidus*, which means "white", is the etymon of English *candid*.

Etymologists apply a number of methods to study the origins of words, some of which are: a) Philological research specifies that changes in the form and meaning of the word can be traced with the aid of older texts, if such are available; b) The comparative method: by a systematic comparison of related languages, etymologists may often be able to detect which words derive from their common ancestor language and which were instead later borrowed from another language; c) By making use of dialectological data the form or meaning of the word might show variations between dialects, which may yield clues about its earlier history; d) Studying of semantic change etymologists must often make hypotheses about changes in the meaning of particular words and the assumption of a particular change of meaning may be substantiated by showing that the same type of change has occurred in other languages as well.

Observing through its etymology the researchers clarified that, English has taken over plethora of words from most the other languages with which it has had contact. It has taken many expressions from ancient languages, Latin and Greek, and these borrowings usually have academic or literary associations. English speakers continue to borrow words from almost every language spoken upon the earth, although no longer with the frequency characteristic of the late middle Ages and Renaissance. There has also been a shift in the relative importance of languages from which English borrows. A study by Garland Cannon of more than a thousand recent loanwords from eighty-four languages shows that about 25 percent are from French: 8 percent each from Japanese and Spanish; 7 percent each from Italian and Latin; 6 percent each from African languages, German, and Greek; 4 percent each from Russian and Yiddish; 3 percent from Chinese, and progressively smaller percentages from Arabic, Portuguese, Hindi, Sanskrit, Hebrew, Afrikaans, Malayo-Polynesian, Vietnamese, Amerindian languages, Swedish, Bengali and thirty other languages.

It is expedient to prove the details with illustrations. For instance, the word "lunatic", which is commonly used in our daily life, is derived from the Latin word "Luna" meaning "moon". It originated from the belief that insanity is caused by changes in the moon. Furthermore, the word "soccer" actually originated in the United Kingdom. Association football was shortened to "socca" (derived from the middle of the word association). This turned into the word "soccer" that is still used in the US, Canada, and Australia. Besides, the words blame and "blaspheme" both originally come from the same Greek word meaning "to say disrespectful things about." Blame has changed to mean more "accuse" or "reproach" while "blaspheme" retains more of its original meaning. It is interesting to find out that the word "sky" is derived from Old Norse sky 'cloud'. An example of metonymy, the shift of meaning of a thing to a thing closely associated with it in time and space. Clouds are located in the sky, so the word

for 'cloud' came to mean 'sky'. Probably the frequently cloudy skies of northern England helped strengthen this metonymic shift. We may continue our list with the word of "clock" which comes from Middle Dutch *clocke*, meaning 'bell, clock', from Old French *cloche* or *cloque* 'bell', from Late Latin *clocca* (imitative of the sound of a bell). It was apparently in Dutch that the crucial semantic shift occurred in the history of this borrowed word: the word that was used to describe the time-keeping noisemaker in the church tower (*bong, bong*) began to be applied to the newfangled timekeeper with hands and numbers on a round display 'face', located in the same tower (*tick, tick*). When the English imported these new timekeepers, often made in Holland and Germany, they imported the word for them: *clock*. But they had their own word for the more traditional bell (namely *bell*, which goes back to Proto-Germanic), so the word *clock* was never polysemous like in Dutch.

In addition, many words in English are formed from a set of Latin roots with different prefixes and suffixes. Knowing the roots of such words may help students to remember or guess their meaning when they see them in context. These words are usually fairly formal. In their formation, they can perhaps be seen as Latinate, formal, equivalent of phrasal verbs. I would like to give some examples of the more common Latin roots, with some of the verbs derived from them, such as *spect*: see, look (*respect, suspect, prospect* and etc), *vert*: turn (*convert, divert, revert*, etc), *port*: carry, take (*transport, import, support*, etc), *pose/pone*: place, put (*postpone, depose, impose*, etc).

Taking all facts above into consideration, it can be deduced that the most plausible social explanation for the evolution of language is intensely negotiated co- operation within small stable groups, based on family or kinship ties. In the long run we expect the evidence for monogenesis of extant languages to become so compelling that the question will be not whether all the world's languages are related, but why it took the linguistic community so long to recognize this obvious fact. Enough has been written to indicate the cosmopolitanism of the present English vocabulary. Yet English remains English in every essential respect. The words that all of us use over and over again and the grammatical structures remain as distinctively English as they were in the days of Alfred the Great. All in all, being aware of the original roots of parts of speech students will have no difficulty not only in spelling the words and creating new word adding the correct suffixes and prefixes, but also in guessing the context meaning of the words as well.

References:

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