

Chapter 4

The Growth Of English

Important Contributors to English:

One of the most interesting factors in the growth of English is the contributions that have been made to its vocabulary and idiom by individual writers of outstanding importance. The translators of the Bible, Shakespeare, Milton, Scott, Carlyle, Dryden, Dr. Johnson and others have all contributed much to English. They have introduced an immense number of new words and expressions into the language, and have given literary currency to common words and phrases.

No work except Shakespeare's has had so much influence on English phraseology as the Authorized Version of the Bible (1611). This version, however, owes much to earlier translations, especially those of Tyndale (1526, 1530-31) and Coverdale (1535). To Tyndale, English owes such expressions as: long-suffering; peace-maker; stumbling-block; fatted calf; scapegoat; and mercy-seat. To Coverdale it owes lovingkindness, tender-mercy, valley of shadow of death, and avenger of blood. The authorized version gave English: city of refuge, howling wilderness, the fat of the land, white sepulchre, and many other familiar phrases.

Of Shakespeare, it may be safely said that his contribution to English phraseology is ten times greater than that of any other writer. From Hamlet come such phrases as this too solid flesh;

mind's eye; the primrose path; more honoured in the breach than the observance; O my prophetic soul; still harping on; the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune; there's the rub; the undiscovered country; to hold the mirror up to nature; very like a whale; a king of shreds and patches; not single spies, but in battalions; to cudgle one's brains; towering passion; stale, flat and unprofitable; to speak daggers; cruel only to be kind; sweets to the sweet; and many other expressions which form an integral part of everyday English.

Milton coined anarchy and moon-struck, and originated such expressive phrases as darkness visible; tears such as angels weep; human face divine; fresh woods and pastures new; the cricket on the hearth; dim religious light.

Scott introduced into literature a number of notable dialect words, such as riad and weird; gruesome; glamour; and stalwart; coined some effective compounds such as free-lance; red-handed; and Norse-man.

To Carlyle English owes such expressions as self-help, the dismal science, swanson, and bolt from the blue. He and Matthew Arnold between them succeeded in naturalizing Philistine in the sense of the German Philister. Arnold also gave "culture" its current sense.

The philosophical, social and political ideas of the late eighteenth century gave birth to such words as colonial and municipality (Burke), international and utilitarian (Bentham), pessimism (Coleridge), constituency (Macaulay), eugenics (Galton), agnostic (Huxley). The progress of industry and

science especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given English thousands of words ranging from Newton's centrifugal and centripetal (in the seventeenth century) to the modern television and electronic computer.

Growth from Within:

Quite apart from external influences, the vocabulary of a language, with consequent increase in power of expression, is enlarged by applying to the native stock the methods of 'compounding', and 'derivation'.

Modern English has inherited the Old English tradition (linguistic habit) of forming compounds and consequently we find such compounds as railway, sewing-machine, post-office, steamboat, one-way-street. However, the method of derivation has not played in English as important a part as the one it has played in German for example. The mixing with foreign languages and especially Latin, Greek and French has tended to cut short the growth of native derivatives and replace them by a mixed vocabulary, for example:

<i>English</i>	<i>Franco- Latin</i>
Rot	petrify
Ox (adjective)	bovine
Tree	arboreal
Nose	nasal
Town	urban

In other cases we have the choice of two or three words, with more or less subtle differentiation of meaning.

kingly (English)	fellow- feeling (English)
royal (French)	compassion (Latin)
regal (Latin)	sympathy (Greek)

English has, however, the unique power of transferring a word from one part of speech to another without change of form.

1. Nouns used as verbs:

to stone a prophet
to paper a room
to ink one's fingers
to toe the line

2. Abstract nouns used as verbs:

to experience misfortunes
to recondition a road

3. Verbs used as nouns:

a shave
a run
a quiet read
a good cry.

4. Nouns used freely as adjectives without change of form:

headmaster
gold watch
railway-carriage
weather-prophet

5. adjectives used as nouns:

to eat greens

he has the blues

6. Adjectives used as verbs:

to black boots

to savage an opponent

7. prepositions used as verbs:

We down tools

We out our opponent

A curious source of new words is the process called back-formation. It is the inferring of a short word from a long one:

pea (pease)	sherry (sherris)
corp (corpse)	mike (microphone)
pub (public place)	cab (taxi-cab)

The practice of reducing long words to their initial syllable goes very far back in English. Perhaps the earliest example is gent which dates from the Wars of the Roses. Other clips have come into the language ever since, for example:

props (properties)	cab (riolet)
mutt (on-head)	mike (microphone)
fan (atic)	
vamp (ire)	
(cara) van	(in) flu (enza)
(omni) bus	
(de) tec (tive)	

Many words owe their modern form to folk-etymology, i.e. the popular tendency to give a more familiar form or sound to an unfamiliar word:

gilly-flower from the French giroflée livelihood for Middle English lifelode (the leading of one's life)

Besides, we have the words, of more or less echoic origin, (onomatopaeic) which the language seems to have created for its own use.

Scream	creech	squeak	squeal	shriek
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Such words as the above are obviously suggestive of certain sounds though they actually do not reproduce them.

Many words of this kind are singularly expressive:

thud	For a heavy fall
throb	For the heart-beat
tang	Suggests metallic percussion
twang	For the bow-string vibration

Much depends on the quality of the vowel, e.g. there is marked difference between clink and clank, and between flip, flop and flap.

Other onomatopaeic words that are most expressive are:

splash	smash	ooze	shriek
sloppy	stop	slush	glide

English is very rich in compounds formed by mere juxtaposition. This mode of formation is common to the Germanic languages, but unfamiliar to the Romance languages, for example:

<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>
Windmill	moulin à vent
Warship	vaisseau de guerre
Rattlesnake	serpent à sonnettes
Woodcut	gravure sur bois

At the present day, in addition to English compounds from native word stock such as picture-house, sea-plane, science is incessantly manufacturing new compounds from Greek of the dynamo-psycho type.

The formation of compound adjectives dates from the time of Shakespeare, and the most picturesque examples of this type are often individual creations:

blood-stained	(Shakespeare)
cloud-capped	(Shakespeare)
ivy-mantled	(Gray)
sunlit	(Shelley)
Moonlit	(Tennyson)

This feature goes as far as even the conversion of phrases into adjectives in:

a matter-of- fact man

an up-to- date idea

a go-ahead firm

A very large group of virtual compounds is supplied by the practice of combining a verb with a preposition or an adverb:

<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>
come in	entrer
go out	sortir
pick up	ramasser

Such combinations date from the Middle English period, and their ever-increasing variety of senses forms one of the great difficulties for foreign students. This element of English is being constantly reinforced from America, e.g.:

to give (a person) away

put in across

get away with it

Such combinations make sentences more expressive and the meaning more exact: “thieves broke in (into) the house” give a truer picture than “entered”; to “put up with” is more expressive than “bear”.

Hundreds of English words have been formed from the names of men and places, and Greek mythology has been a fertile source of such words, for example:

martial	: Mars
jovial	: Jupiter or Jove
mercurial	: Mercury