

## REVIEW OF SOME ETYMOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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### **Abstract**

*The work deals with the review of some etymological problems or challenges of the English Language and the reasons of them. We will touch the History or the origin and development of the English Language and its varieties as well as the borrowed or loan words. Etymologically the vocabulary of the English Language is far from being homogenous. It consists of the two layers – the native stock of words and the borrowed stock of words. The borrowed stock of words is numerically larger than the native one. In fact, native words comprise only 30% of the total number of English vocabulary, but they form the bulk of the words most frequently used in speech and writing. Besides, native words are polysemantic.*

### **Key words**

*etymology, borrowing, origin, history, native, stock, loan, classified, family.*

Sun Wei (2003) defines the etymology as: “Etymology is a branch of linguistics, which is used to explore the source, development and evolution of words.” Western etymological researchers focus more on practical history comparisons and word structure than on the evolution of individual words from ancient to present times. Its outstanding characteristic is to compare and structure. Robert K. Barnhart (1988) defines the etymology like exploring the historical, political, and rhetorical wonderland of our linguistic heritage.

### **History of the English Language and the Background of English Vocabulary**

History of the English language is one of the fundamental courses forming the linguistic background of a specialist in philology. It studies the rise and

development of English, its structure and peculiarities in the old days, its similarity to other languages of the same family and its unique, specific features. It is a diachronistic view of the language, that is aimed at understanding the very essence of the language that seems to be so unique in many respects today. In contrast to synchronistic approach with its study of a language as a system of inter-related phenomena, separate aspects of the language are going to be investigated (Verba, L., 2004, p.7).

English arose in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England and what is now southeast Scotland. Following the extensive influence of Great Britain and the United Kingdom from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, it has been widely propagated around the world, becoming the leading language of international discourse and the lingua franca in many regions (Bosworth and Toller, 2010).

Descent from a common ancestor is not the only type of relationship between languages. A relationship which is more obvious and which has greatly influenced the vocabulary of our languages is that which has come about through borrowing; and to see the effect of this, we should know something of the history of the English language. During the Stone and early Bronze Ages, the British Isles were inhabited by a non-Indo-European race, about which next to nothing is known. Around 1000 BC, however, the Celts began to arrive in Britain and to conquer the prehistoric inhabitants, eventually completely wiping out their language. Thus, for some centuries, the languages of the British Isles were of the Celtic group, and a few of their descendants, Welsh and Irish, for instance, are spoken today. In the first century AD, the Romans began the conquest of Britain, and for the next several hundred years were in control of most of it. Romanization was proceeding on the island in much the same fashion as on the Continent, when the Roman occupation was cut short by the withdrawal of the legions, which were sent to buttress the tottering Roman Empire against the onslaughts of the eastern barbarians. The language of the British Celts, therefore, was never completely replaced by Latin. But something did happen to the Celtic languages of Britain, for it has already been pointed out that English is a Teutonic language. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, after the Roman troops had been withdrawn, the Celts, having been exposed for some time to the softening effects of civilization, found themselves unable to resist the incursions of the fierce northern tribes, which had never been subdued by the Romans. The Celtic leaders sought the aid of certain Germanic peoples living on the Continent to help them in their struggle. The Germans, however, found the island so much to their liking that they decided to remain, and in fact they conquered for themselves most of what is now England. These Teutonic tribes were known as the Angles,

Saxons, and Jutes; their language is called Anglo-Saxon, and it became the basis of modern English. As a matter of fact, the English language took its name from that of one of the tribes. From the very first, however, Anglo-Saxon or Old English was subjected to outside influences. Even before the Angles and Saxons came to Britain, they had come in contact with Roman civilization. For a time large parts of Germany were under Roman Domination, and from the Roman soldiers and the inevitable traders who traveled in their wake, the languages of the Teutonic tribes received a large number of Latin words. These words generally indicate the new products and concepts which were acquired from contact with a higher civilization. Thus, when they arrived in England, the Anglo-Saxons already had borrowed such words as *stræt* (from Latin via *strata*, "paved road"), which became *street* in modern English (Williams, J., p.5).

According to John Algeo (2010), language in general is an ability inherent in us. Specific languages such as English are systems that result from that ability. We can know the underlying ability only through studying the actual languages that are its expressions. Thus, one of the best reasons for studying languages is to find out about ourselves, about what makes us persons. And the best place to start such study is with our own language, the one that has nurtured our minds and formed our view of the world. A good approach to studying languages is the historical one. To understand how things are, it is often helpful and sometimes essential to know how they got to be that way. If we are psychologists who want to understand a person's behavior, we must know something about that person's origins and development. The same is true of a language. Another reason for studying the history of English is that many of the irregularities in today's language are the remnants of earlier, quite regular patterns. For example, the highly irregular plurals of nouns like *man-men*, *mouse-mice*, *goose-geese*, and *ox-oxen* can be explained historically. So can the spelling of Modern English, which may seem chaotic, or at least unruly, to anyone who has had to struggle with it (p.34).

### **Borrowing**

Borrowed words/loan words or borrowings are words taken over from another language and modified according to the patterns of the receiving language. In many cases a borrowed word especially one borrowed long ago is practically indistinguishable from a native word without a thorough etymological analysis (*street*, *school*, *face*). The number of borrowings in the vocabulary of a language and the role played by them is determined by the historical development of the nation speaking the language (Pullum, 2006).

The most characteristic feature of English is usually said to be its mixed character. Many linguists consider foreign influence, especially that of French, to be the most important factor in the history of English. This wide-spread viewpoint is supported only by the evidence of the English word-stock, as its grammar and phonetic system are very stable and not easily influenced by other languages.

Etymological structure of English word-stock consists of 2 types of words – native words and borrowings (Crystal, 2002).

### **The Etymological Structure of English Vocabulary**

#### **The native element**

I. Indo-European element

II. Germanic element

III. English proper element (brought by Angles, Saxons and Jutes not earlier than 5th c. A.D.)

#### **The borrowed element**

1. Celtic (5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> c. A.D.)

2. Latin

1<sup>st</sup> group: 1<sup>st</sup> c. B.C.

2<sup>nd</sup> group: 7<sup>th</sup> c. A.D.

3<sup>rd</sup> group: the Renaissance period

3. Scandinavian (8<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> c. A.D.)

4. French

a) Norman borrowings: 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> c. A.D.

b) Parisian borrowings: (Renaissance)

5. Greek (Renaissance)

6. Italian (Renaissance and later)

7. Spanish (Renaissance and later)

8. German

9. Indian and others

Almost all words of Anglo-Saxon origin belong to very important semantic groups. They include most of the auxiliary and modal verbs (shall, will, must, can, may, etc.), pronouns (I, you, he, my, his, who, etc.), prepositions (in, out, on, under, etc.), numerals (one, two, three, four, etc.) and conjunctions (and, but, till, as, etc.) (Blench, R.; Spriggs, Matthew 1999). Notional words of Anglo-Saxon origin include such groups as words denoting parts of the body (head, hand, arm, back, etc.), members of the family and closest relatives (father, mother, brother, son, wife), natural phenomena and planets (snow, rain, wind, sun, moon, star, etc.), animals

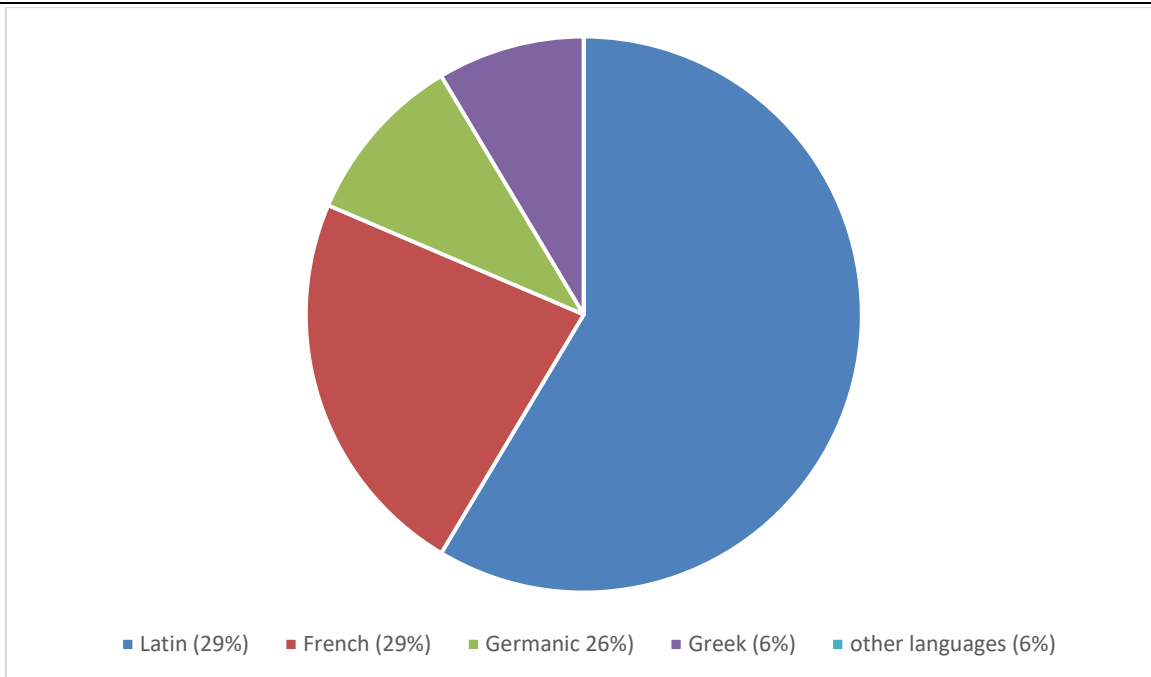
(horse, cow, sheep, cat), qualities and properties (old, young, cold, hot, light, dark, long), common actions (do, make, go, come, see, hear, eat, etc.), etc.

Highly polysemantic are the words man, head, hand, go, etc. Most native words possess a wide range of lexical and grammatical valency. Many of them enter a number of phraseological units, e.g. the word heel enters the following units: heel over head or head over heels – 'upside down'; cool one's heel – 'be kept waiting'; show a clean pair of heels, take to one's heels – 'run away', turn on one's heels – 'turn sharply round', etc.

Research shows that 26% of modern English is taken from Germanic English. Old English words changed, altered and modified. Old English words had massive change or sound shift in pronunciation and form. The English language uses the Latin alphabet of 26 consonants and vowels. Old English words changed, altered and modified. For example;

Father- faeder; modor -mother; brothor- brother; neah- near; that - thaet; nu - now; oft - often; rice - powerful; sarig - sad, sorrowful; ariht - right; beorht - bright; dyre - dear, lovely; eald - old; til - good; wlanc - proud; sellan - to sell; swincan - to struggle; willan - to want; witan - to know; writan - to write.

The vocabulary of English language is a blend of Germanic (Old English and Scandinavian), Greek, Latin and French where major chunk is from Latin, Germanic, Greek, and French with few words from other languages owing to its very receptive nature. The English language is considered to be the world language of today. It has an extensive amount of words not found in other languages & its rich vocabulary may sufficiently accommodate all the situations of a social and technical nature. "A sample of other adaptations are: Spanish-cigar, mosquito, tornado, tomato (tomate) and potato (patata). Hebrew-amen, manna, messiah, rabbi and jubilee. Norwegian-ski. Finnish- sauna. Czech- robot. Hungarian-paprika. Portuguese-marmalade, flamingo and molasses. Turkish-turban, coffee and caviar. Hindi- sahib, maharajah, jungle, cheetah, karma, mantra and dhoti. Persian-divan, purdah, bazaar and chess. Tamil- curry. Chinese-tea. Japanese-judo and jujitsu. Malay-ketchup, sago and bamboo. Polynesian-taboo and tattoo. African languages- mumbo jumbo and voodoo. Caribbean-hammock, hurricane and tobacco. These are just a few examples of adaptations."



To conclude, we have surveyed some etymological problems or challenges of the English Language and the reasons of them. We have studied some aspects of the history or the origin and development of the English Language and its varieties as well as borrowed or the loan words as etymologically the vocabulary of the English Language is not homogenous. It consists of the two layers – the native stock of words and the borrowed stock of words. The borrowed stock of words is numerically larger than the native one. In fact, native words comprise only 30% of the total number of English vocabulary, but they form the bulk of the words most frequently used in speech and writing. Thus about 70% of English word-stock are borrowed words.

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