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Etymological Analysis of the English Language Words

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Abstract

This paper is the brief description of borrowed words and etymology of the English language words based on documentary analysis. Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (2010) defined etymology as the study of the origin of words, historical perspectives, and modification in the meanings of these words. The theory regarding etymological analysis of the words helps to recognize that mostly the words originate through a limited number of fundamental parameters, the most important element is borrowing the words from other languages, formation of words such as derivation and compounding; and onomatopoeia and sound symbolism. Sometimes the semantic change also occurs. In regards to the etymological analysis, the English language vocabulary consists of two types of strata such as the native reservoirs and a pool of borrowed words. The number of borrowed words from different languages and sources is greater than the collection of Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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native words. Etymology of English language words is beneficial for ESL students. It helps to enhance their vocabulary and knowledge.

Introduction

Etymology can be defined as the systematic study of the birth, historical perspective, and time-to-time changes in the forms and implications of words (Ross, 1962). The study of the etymology of the English language words is an interesting and useful area. According to Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (2010), the majority of the English language words have been derived from other primitive languages such as Latin and Greek. Moreover, the roots of the English language can be found in Greek and Latin languages. Most of the English language words are formed by adding prefixes or suffixed. Furthermore the continuous changes occurred in this language since its inception. Sometimes, while analyzing the origin of the English language words, one can easily perceive the philological aspect of the language and even can guess the actual meanings of the words (Pierson, 1989).

Significance of the Study

This study will provide the knowledge about the borrowed words and their etymological analysis. This will help the students increase their vocabulary regarding etymological approach in English Language. It will also help the students to develop the interest about the etymology of English language words. This study may assist the ESL teachers to provide the guidelines in the classroom effectively. This study may provide bases for further research also.

Objectives of the Study

The major objective of the study is to find out the different words borrowed from different languages and secondly to describe the etymology of most commonly used English language words

Research Methodology

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Through documentary analysis, the parameters and mechanism adopted by different linguistics regarding the etymology of the English Language has been examined in this research study.

Review of the related Literature

Knowing about the origin of the English language words is a valuable asset for second language learners; it could benefit second-language instruction a lot also. Moreover, the knowledge about the historical perspectives and changes in the forms of the English language words helps understand the real spirit of the English language learning and can make it a meaningful learning (Ausubel, Novak, & Hanesian, 1968).

Actually, 30% words of the English language are native; however, they are being used frequently in the English language in spite of the smaller number. Moreover, these words possess a broad range of lexical and syntactic structures (Klein, 1966).

Sometimes, it looks difficult to differentiate between a native word and a borrowed word that had been borrowed very long ago unless the word is analyzed etymologically. The study of historical development is also indispensable in this respect (Stockwell & Minkova, 2001).

It is natural fact that the languages influence each other if they have a contact for a long period. The words are taken for temporary use but latter are adapted by the other languages permanently. This is the process that is called borrowing (language does not give it back, but keeps it forever). In addition, these borrowed words are deemed as the part of the language.

As, we peep into the history and the background of the English language words, we came to know that the English language remained in contact with many other different languages of the world such as Greek, Latin, French and Old Norse. Many other colonial languages, where the British ruled over a long period, had a contact for centuries with the English language.

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There are multifarious reasons of borrowing words from other languages (Katamba, 2005), no specific reason for borrowing words is valid in this context. In addition, no limit for borrowing words from other languages is pertinent.

Shipley (2001) mentioned that the most important factor of borrowing words from other languages is an automatic transfer of words during the contact period with other languages. It is a natural phenomenon that the users of the English language take and adapt the words of other languages unconsciously while interacting with other people.

The source of borrowing and the origin of borrowing words have significant importance; therefore, they should be distinguished while analyzing the English language words. The close interaction between the languages is a rationale for borrowing words (Barfield, 1967).

The words of the English language can be categorized into different classes such as loan words and semantic loans. The loan words mean the words that have been borrowed from other languages, on the other side, semantic meaning the meanings of the English language words.

According to surveys conducted by Finkenstaedt, Wolff, Neuhaus, and Herget (1973), Williams (1986), modern English language has derived many words from different languages. The percentage of Latin (including words used only in scientific/medical/legal context), French, Germanic, Greek and others is 29%, 29%, 26%, 6%, and 10% respectively. According to Skeat (1892), the English language consists of 178 Anglo-Saxon root words and 280 others, and the majority of them is borrowed from Latin or Greek. Henry (1993) reported that ‘twelve (12) Latin and two (2) Greek roots, besides 20 other most frequently used prefixes generated about 100,000 words.

Latin loans are classified into the subgroups: here is a brief list of words that have been borrowed from other languages and now they are commonly used in the English language. According to Cougar (2001), Derksen (2008), Harper (2000, 2001, 2010) and Matasovic (2009), the following words have been borrowed from other languages.

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Words Borrowed by the English Language from other Languages

Sr. No	Words and brief description	Borrowed from
1	<i>Ad hoc</i> (the thing that is done for a particular purpose only)	Latin
2	<i>Artist, Bureau, Cabinet, Chef, Cheque, Diplomat, Justice, Gallop, Nature, Précis, Restaurant,</i>	French
3	<i>Bona fide</i> (true, real or genuine).	Latin
4	<i>Calendar</i>	Latin
5	<i>Cookies</i>	Dutch
6	<i>Bangle, Bungalow, Chapatti, Curry, Jungle, Loot, Pyjamas, Shampoo, Yoga</i>	Hindi
7	<i>Democracy</i>	Greek
8	<i>Eureka</i> ('I searched or found it': Archimedes spoke spontaneously as he discovered the 'law of buoyancy'. This interjection is used when one finds or discovers something unique)	Greek
9	<i>Gestalt</i> ('figure, or a constituted sketch)	German
10	<i>Fog</i>	Danish
11	<i>Guitar</i>	Spanish
12	<i>Lemon</i>	Farsi
13	<i>Mafia</i> ('boldness, a group of people involved in criminal activities)	Italian
14	<i>Opera, Piano, Pizza, Studio, Solo, Traffic, , Umbrella, Volcano,</i>	Italian
15	<i>Paper</i>	Egyptian
16	<i>Pro forma</i> (A standard or prescribed form or documents)	Latin
17	<i>Plethora</i> (an excessive amount of fluid or blood in a body)	Greek
18	<i>Robot</i>	Czech
19	<i>Sputnik</i> ('co-traveler' Russian artificial satellites ' <i>Nik</i> ' is used as a suffix that denotes the state of original words)	Russian
20	<i>Troika</i> (a vehicle run by three horses, triple or a group of three powerful authorities)	Russian
21	<i>Ski</i>	Norwegian
22	<i>Tsunami</i> (a long sea wave caused by an earthquake or any other disturbance)	Japanese
23	<i>Tête-à-tête</i> (face to face, a personal or confidential conversation)	French
24	<i>Verbatim</i> (the exact or original words used in a passage)	Latin
25	<i>Vis-à-vis</i> (face-to-face' while sitting together)	French
26	Yo-yo	Tagalog
27	Yoghurt	Turkish
28	Zero	Arabic

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Algeo (1980) Stockwell and Minkova (2001) stated that the words are formed with the help of different methods and processes. The relationship between sound and meaning and their changes over time that underline the reconstruction. They mentioned the most important processes of the formation of words which are as follows.

- i. **Borrowing:** a majority of the words used in English today is of foreign origin.
- ii. **Shortening or Clipping:** It is a process whereby an appropriate chunk of an existing word is omitted.
- iii. **Functional Shift:** It is a process by which an existing word or formation comes to be used with another grammatical function.
- iv. **Back-formation:** It occurs when a real or supposed affix is removed from a word to create a new one. (For example *Cherry* from *Cherise*)
- v. **Blend:** Sometimes, the words are formed by blending two or more than two words (e.g. *brunch* from *breakfast* plus *lunch*)
- vi. **Acronyms Formation:** It means the formation of words by acronyms (such as *radar* (**radio detecting and ranging**))
- vii. **Transfer of personal or place names:** The names of people, place or things may become generalized vocabulary words with the passage of time (e.g. *forsythia* developed from the name of a botanist William Forsyth)
- viii. **Imitation of Sounds:** Words are created by *onomatopoeia* also, to name a thing by the reproduction of the sound. Words such as *buzz*, *hiss*, and *guffaw* are of imitative origin.
- ix. **Folk Etymology:** A process, in which a word is altered, resembles partially to the word from which it is derived. For example, the Latin word *febrifuge* (a plant with medicinal properties, etymologically ‘fever explore’) was modified into English as *Feverfew*.
- x. **Combining Word Elements:** It is the process when someone feels need to form a new word or idea with the help of considerable storage of prefixes, suffixes already existing in English. (For example many words and ideas can be developed with the help of *ism*)

According to Stockwell and Minkova (2001), and Webster (2006), etymology is useful for students to expand their vocabulary. The following words that are most commonly used in the English language are analyzed etymologically here briefly (Barnhart, 1995; Barnhart & Steinmetz, 1988, 1999; Barnhart, Steinmetz, & Barnhart, 1990; Harper, 2001; Hoad, 1993; Robert, 1988).

- 1- **Abstract:** from Latin word ‘*abstractus*’ means ‘to draw away’ and ‘*abstrahere*’ means ‘to drag away’
- 2- **Aeroplane:** from Greek ‘*aero*’ means ‘air’ + stem of French ‘*planer*’ means ‘to soar’; and from Latin ‘*plans*’ means ‘level’ or ‘flat’.

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- 3- **Alberta**: Canadian Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, she was the 4th daughter of Queen Victoria, She was named for her father, Prince Albert.
- 4- **Algebra**: derived from Arabic word '*aljebr*'. It means to recollect the broken pieces,' the Muslim mathematician Abu Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi used it first.
- 5- **Alma Mater**: from Latin '*alere*' means 'to nourish'+ '*mater*' means 'mother', First used 1710 in the sense of 'one's university or school' with reference to British universities.
- 6- **America**: a person named 'Americus', claimed to navigate and discover America.
- 7- **Anarchy**: from French word '*anarchie*' or from Modern Language '*anarchia*' and from Greek '*anarkhia*' that means 'lack of a leader' or 'the state of people without a government' or from '*anarkhos*', 'an' means without and '*arkhos*' means leader so it means '*leaderless*' or '*rulerless*'.
- 8- **Anatolia**: ancient name of Asia Minor, from Greek '*anatole*' means 'the east', originally 'sunrise' or 'a rising above; the horizon and from '*anatellein*' means 'to rise'; '*ana*' means 'up' and '*tellein*' means 'to accomplish' or 'to perform'.
- 9- **April Fool**: from Old Norse '*gaukr*'; means 'a cuckoo'. The people were deceived and sent to a false place. The date on that day was 1st April. So this day is called 'April Fool's Day'. This custom came to England from France in the 17th century. Whereas, contrary to this, May 1st was considered to make the people fool in England.
- 10- **Badminton**: it was the name of a place where the game was played first. The name of place name is 'Badmyncgtun that means 'an estate of Baduhelm.
- 11- **Banana**: this word was used first time as a slang word at a mockery stage in 1910. It is used as slang for 'comedian', especially at a burlesque show.
- 12- **Baseball**: a combination of American English words; '*base*' and '*ball*'. It means 'the game of 'rounders'.
- 13- **Boycott**: a British tiller named Capitan Charles C. Boycott (1832-1897), who rejected to reduce rent for his cultivators. The newspapers adopted this word instantly in 1880.
- 14- **Catharsis**: originated from Greek word '*katharsis*' it means to 'purify', or to make clean.
- 15- **Chocolate**: from Spanish word '*xocolatl*' or '*xococ*' which means *bitter* + *atl water*, or 'to make bitter'. '*Jocolatte*' is the oldest use of 'chocolate' since it was brought to Spain in 1520.

- 16- **Coffee**: derived from Turkish word '*caffé*' or '*kahveh*' and from Arabic word '*qahwah*'.
- 17- **Daisy**: derived from Old English words '*dægesege*' which means the 'day's eye' the reason being the petals of that plant open in the morning and close in the evening.
- 18- **Dead Sea**: from Hebrew word '*yam hammelah*' means 'water with no life; and Arabic word '*al-bahr al-mayyit*' means the sea which is dead, due to its salty water. Actually its water is twenty-six per cent (26%) salty whereas the water of the other seas is 3 or 4 per cent salty.
- 19- **December**: from Old French, '*December*', and from Latin '*December*' '*decem*' means 'ten'; therefore it is considered the 10th month the year.
- 20- **Dengue**: From West Indies, perhaps Swahili '*dingo*' and Spanish word '*dengue*' means a severe pain and stiffness in the body.
- 21- **Dichotomy**: from Greek word '*dichotomia*' means 'a cutting in half' and from '*dicha*' means 'in two' + '*temnein*' means 'to cut'.
- 22- **Dilemma**: from Late Latin and Greek '*dilemma*' which means 'double proposition' a technical term in rhetoric, from '*di*' means 'two' + '*lemma*' means 'premise' anything received or taken, from the root of '*lambanein*' means 'to take'.
- 23- **Dollar**: from Low German '*daler*' and '*taler*'. It was used later '*thaler*', The '*thaler*' which means a big silver coin.
- 24- **Egypt**: Old English '*Egipete*' and from French '*Egypte*' from Greek '*Aigyptos*' which means 'the river Nile'. The word '*Misr*' is used in the Arabic language. It has been derived from 'Mizraim' that is the son of Biblical Ham.
- 25- **Encyclopedia**: derived from French '*Encyclopédie*' and adopted by the Modern Language as '*encyclopedia*' that means a collection of words of information arranged alphabetically.
- 26- **Equator**: from Latin '*aequare*' means 'to make equal'.
- 27- **February**: from Latin '*februarius mensis*' 'month of purification', from *februa* 'purifications, expiatory rites'. The last month of the ancient Roman calendar, so named in reference to the Roman feast of purification. In Britain, replaced Old English '*solmonað*' means 'mud month'. English first borrowed it from Old French '*fevrier*' which yielded '*feoverel*' before a respelling to conform to Latin.

- 28- **Hague:** city in Netherland, from ‘*Du. Den Haag*’, short for’s ‘*Gravenhage*’, literally ‘the court’s hedge’. In French, it is ‘*La Haye*’.
- 29- **Hamburger:** the word ‘*burg*’ is German that means ‘fort’ Old High German ‘*hamma*’ or ‘*ham*’, means ‘back of the knee’. A burger is a shot from hamburger.
- 30- **Jean:** from the Italian city ‘*Genoa*’ where the cloth was made first as in blue jeans.
- 31- **Kaaba:** from the Arabic word means ‘a cube-shaped building’ or ‘square house’ The great Masjid of Makkah, Saudi Arabia.
- 32- **Mosque:** modern French word ‘*mosquée*’ or ‘*moseak*’, from Italian ‘*moschea*’, from Spanish ‘*mesquita* (modern *mezquita*), means place of mosquito, The correct word for Muslim worship is ‘Masjid’ not mosque.
- 33- **Nicotine:** French word Nicotine, from Modern Latin ‘*Nicotiana*’, named for Jean Nicot or Nicolas, who brought the seeds of tobacco.
- 34- **OK:** mistakenly or wrongly derived word perhaps; *Oll Korrekt, All Right*, American president Martin Van Buren known as his nickname *Old Kinderhook*, or from *Objection Killed*.
- 35- **Olympic:** ‘*Olympos*’, is a town or district in Greece, The athletic competitions were held in 776 BC. Since then Olympic Games are held after every four years.
- 36- **Paper:** from Anglo French and Old French word ‘*papier*, and from Latin ‘*papyrus*’ means the paper plant’ from which the paper is made of papyrus stalks. In addition, from Greek ‘*papyros*’ means ‘any plant of the paper’ from which the paper is made. It is also said to be of Egyptian origin.
- 37- **Port:** derived from the Latin word ‘*porta*’ means ‘gate’ or ‘door’ and ‘*portare*’ means ‘passage’ and ‘entrance’. Shortened form of Oporto, the chief port for exporting wines from Portugal.
- 38- **Portugal:** was the name of person ‘*Portyngale*’; the pioneer king of Portugal.
- 39- **Sadism:** from Fench word ‘*sadisme*’ that means to feel pleasure in cruel act especially sexual indulgence deliberately.
- 40- **Sandwich:** the King of Hawaii Island whose name was Earl Sandwich. He used to eat the slices of meat inside it at his game table instead of a proper meal. Generally, this word is used to force someone to put in a squeezed space.

- 41- **Tea:** basically derived from a Portuguese word ‘*chaa*’, or Russian ‘*chai*’, or Persian ‘*cha*’ which means a drinking beverage. Initially the Dutch imported the tea plant leaves to England through the East India Company.
- 42- **Tobacco:** From Spanish, *tabaco*’ means ‘a roll of tobacco leaves’ which were used for medicine purpose. The Arabic word ‘*tabbaq*’ means the name of various herbs. So it can be said that word is, actually, a European that has been transferred to an American plant.
- 43- **Turkey:** ‘guinea bird’ that was imported from Madagascar via Turkey.
- 44- **Valentine:** Saint Valentine was a name of priest or Latin ‘*Valentinus*’, which means ‘strength’. 14th February is celebrated as Valentine’s Day every year. The people send cards or flowers to their dear ones.
- 45- **Xylophone:** coined from Greek ‘*xylon*’ means ‘wood’ and ‘*phone*’ means ‘a sound’.

Discussion and Conclusion

Etymology helps in learning a new language. The ESL students can learn new words easily and faster using etymology through the comparison and contrast of each foreign word similar in their native language. In this way, the students create link between English words learned by the students and their native language. The students understand the similarities between languages and they try to get the meaning of the words. The research carried out by Zolfagharkhani and Moghadam (2011) shows that etymology has a positive impact on the ESL students.

Etymology also improves reading speed and comprehension level. It helps to enhance the stock of vocabulary. It promotes and refines the quality of language to use proper words in writing and speech. It helps to think clearly and effectively to communicate vigorously. In a nutshell, it can be said that etymology is a ‘tool’ to understand the un-known words encountered by the ESL students (Anttila, 2000).

The teachers should provide guidelines to the students about the prefixes, roots, and suffixes in English so that the students can fully understand the different parts and syllables of words and their Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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meanings also. Some linguists say that the provision of knowledge about etymology in the classroom can help the students whose native language is other than English such as Arabic, Chinese, and Urdu etc.

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