

Word Formation; Basic Issues

Word Formation processes

The vocabulary of most languages like English is almost always expanding; **first**, new words can be added. **Second**, new words can enter a language through the process of word formation rules or derivational morphology. Finally, new meanings can be associated with already existing words which ,in turn, contribute to the expansion of the vocabulary of a language.

First: Creating new words (Neologism)

Speakers of a language continually create **new nonexistent words** using the following processes:

- 1- **Coined Words (coinage)**: It is one of the least common processes ,in comparison to other processes, by which entirely new nonexistent words keep entering a language. Speakers constantly invent new sequence of sounds and pair it with a new meaning. For example:

adolescent slang has given us words such as geek and dweeb. This process is also referred to as an **invention**.

2- **Acronyms:** Acronymy is a process whereby a word is formed from the initials or beginning segments of a succession of words. The word radar is derived from radio detecting and ranging and the word laser is derived from; light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation. Speakers usually forget their origins and acronyms become independent words. They are widely used in the world of computers e.g. URL is pronounced as 'earl' and abbreviated from uniform resource locator, and LAN (pronounced as lan) is derived from Local area network. Different types of abbreviation processes, and one of them is acronyms, are increasingly common in American society as a means of words formation.

3- **Alphabetic abbreviations:** It is a process whereby the initial letters of longer words are taken to be used as words. For many speakers of American English abbreviations such as CD, ER and PC have entirely replaced longer words such as compact disc, emergency room, and personal computer. An important point to be noted is that initialisms are pronounced by each letter individually.

4- **Clippings:** Another type of abbreviations which is composed by cutting off the beginning or the end of a word, or both, leaving a part to stand for the whole.

a) **Clipped abbreviations** such as prof for professor, fax for facsimile, and photo for photographic opportunity

b) **Orthographic abbreviations** such as Dr. (doctor) , Mr. (minster) and MB (megabyte). In this process, the spelling is shortened but the pronunciation is not altered; it remains the same.

5-**Blends** are new words formed by the fusion of two words into one ,usually the first part of one word with the last part of another one. Examples are motel (from motor hotel) , brunch (from breakfast and lunch), trashware (from trash and software etc.

6- **Gentrified words** are words for specific brand names of products used as names for the product in general (generification). Hence, Kleenex is a brand name for the product facial tissue, now it is used to refer to tye product in general. Moreover, Xerox is the name of the corporation that produces a well known photocopying machine. Yet, the term xerox has lost its brand_name corporation and has come to be used to describe the process of photocopying in general e.g. I xeroxed a letter.

1- **Proper nouns** not infrequently, a trait, quality, act, or some behaviour associated with a person becomes identified with that person's name typically his or her last name. For example the word guillotine (an instrument of execution named after its inventor Joseph Guillotine. Thousands of such words are now part of English. Similarly, **antonomasia** is the formation of a common noun, verb or adjective from the name of a person or a place.

7-**Borrowings** are words that are borrowed from other language and become independent words in a particular language. This process is the most common sources of new words in English and it is of two types:

a) **Direct borrowings**; speakers of English use aggressively borrow words from other languages; kindergarten(German) ,sushi (Japanese) ,croissant (French) etc.

b) **Indirect borrowings** are types of borrowing in which words from other languages are translated literally in English. Indirect borrowed words are also referred to as loan translations or calques. For instance, the English word superman is thought to be a loan translation of the German word 'Uber_mensch' where Uber in German means supper and mensch means man in English.

8-**Echoic words**, echoism is the formation of words whose sounds suggest their meaning like *hiss* and *peewee*. The meaning is usually a sound either natural like the roar of water or artificial like the clang of a bell. The meaning of the sound may also be the creature that produces it like *moan*, *murmur*, *thunder*, *click* etc. Such words are known as **onomatopoeias** in literature.

Second: Derivational Morphology (Word Formation Rules)

New vocabulary can also be added by following rules that incorporate specific **derivational processes**. For the most part, the core of each process is **an already existing word**, to which other words and affixes can be added. English has dozens of rules which expand the process of

word formations in a language, and here are a few of the most common.

1-Compounds and Compounding

In English and in many other languages, new words can be formed from already existing words by a process known as compounding, in which individual words are “joined together” to form a compound word. For example, the noun ‘ape’ can be joined with the noun ‘man’ to form the compound noun ‘ape-man’; the adjective ‘sick’ can be joined with the noun ‘room’ to form the compound noun sickroom; the adjective red can be joined with the adjective hot to form the compound adjective red-hot. The part of speech of the compound word is determined by the part of speech of the word on the right hand. That is why sky-blue is considered as an adjective and high chair as a noun.

Compound words are not limited to two words. Indeed, the process of compounding is unlimited in English: starting with a word like *sailboat*, we can easily construct the compound *sailboat rigging*, from which we can in turn create *sailboat rigging design*, *sailboat rigging design training*, *sailboat rigging design training institute*, and so on. It is ,then, important to note that this process is considered as part of the derivational processes as long as it is concerned with the structure of words. Thus, a compound is a **separate word** formed by joining two individual words together.

2-The Agentive Suffix -er

Agentive nouns are formed by the word formation rule which states “Add the suffix -er to a verb.” Examples are:

Verbs	Agentive nouns (V + er)
Write	Writer
Play	Player
Kill	Killer

3-The -able Suffix

Another word formation rule states that a great number of adjectives can be formed by adding the suffix able to verbs. For instance,

Verb	Adjective(V + able)
Read	Readable
Wash	Washable
Break	Breakable

4-The Diminutive Suffix -y/-ie

English has a so-called diminutive suffix, usually spelled -y (or -ie), which is added to nouns such as those in the following pairs: dad–daddy, mom–mommy, dog–doggy, horse–horsie.

5-Back formation is the process of forming a new word by removing actual or supposed affixes from another word. Put simply, a back-formation is a shortened word (such as edit) created from a longer word (editor). The verb back-form is itself a back-formation. It is a historical fact about English that the nouns pedlar, beggar, hawker, stoker, scavenger, swindler, editor, burglar, and sculptor

all existed in the language before the corresponding verbs to peddle, to beg, to hawk, to stoke, to scavenge, to swindle, to edit, to burgle, and to sculpt.

6. Reduplication is a process of forming a new word usually by doubling a morpheme with a change of vowel or initial consonant as in pooh-pooh, tiptop and hanky-panky. Most frequently, the basic morpheme is the one on the right hand (the second part) as in dilly-dally. Yet, it might be the first part like ticktock , both parts like singsong , or none of them as in boogie-woogie. Such words are also referred to as twin words which can be divided into three types:

The word a. The base morpheme is repeated without a change e.g. tick-tick and clop-clop.

b. The base morpheme is repeated with a change of initial consonant e.g. roly-poly and fuddy-duddy.

d. The base morpheme is repeated with a change of vowels e.g. chitchat and tiptop.

Note: this process differs from the previous ones in that the core of it is not always an already existing word.

Changing the meaning of an already existing word

There are numerous ways by which **new meaning** becomes associated with **already existing words** which contribute to the expansion of the formation of words in a language:

- The grammatical category of the word changes (change in part of speech).

- The vocabulary of one domain is extended to a new domain (metaphorical extension).
- The meaning of a word broadens in scope (broadening).
- The meaning of a word narrows in scope (narrowing).
- The meaning of a complex word involves restricting the more general compositional meaning of the complex word (semantic drift).
- The meaning of a word changes to the opposite of its original meaning (reversal).

1-Change in part of speech

Words can be modified by changing their grammatical category. The nouns ponytail and people can be used as verbs; to ponytail her hair and to people an island. The noun ponytail refers to hair that is tied at the back of the head whereas the verb to ponytail refers to the process of making a ponytail.

2-Metaphorical Extension

A metaphorical extension is the extension of meaning in a new direction through popular adoption of an original metaphorical comparison. It is another way in which the meaning of an existing word is modified, thus resulting in new uses. To take one example: it is interesting to note that speakers of English have adopted many existing terms from the realm of ocean navigation to use in talking about space exploration. For instance, they use the word ship to refer to space vehicles as well as to ocean-going vessels.

we speak of navigation in both types of transportation. They speak of certain objects as floating in space and of ships as floating on water; we speak of a captain and a crew for both kinds of transportation. Though the technology used in the two realms is radically different, we perceive enough similarities to use exiting words for describing new phenomena. Another example is the extension of words related to the physical realm of food and digestion to describe the mental realm of ideas. Examples are as follows:

- a. I'll have to **chew** on that idea for a while.
- b. They just wouldn't **swallow** that idea.
- c. She'll give us time to **digest** that idea.
- d. He **bit** off more than he could **chew**.

3-Broadening

It occurs when a word with a specific or limited meaning is widened. It is sometimes referred to as generalisation of words. An example is holy day was used to refer to a religious feast. With the passage of time, its meaning become broader to refer to the very general break from work called a holiday.

4-Narrowing

Conversely, the use of a word can narrow as well. A typical example is the word meat. At one time in English it meant any solid consumable food (a meaning that persists in the word nutmeat), but now it is used to refer only to the edible solid flesh of animals.

5-Semantic Drift

It is the evolution of word usage usually to the point that modern meaning is radically different from the original usage. Over time the meaning of words can change. The word apology was used in the past with the meaning *to defend oneself*. Its meaning evolved with time to refer to *formal statement of regret*. The word idiot was used to refer to *anybody who is not a clergyman* but now it is used to refer to *a stupid person*.

6-Reversals

Finally, reversals of meaning can occur. In certain varieties of American slang, the word *bad* has come to have positive connotations, with roughly the meaning “*emphatically good*.” Reversal mean that the same word comes to be used with an opposing meaning of its own old meaning.

References

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