

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LEXICON AS THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL CHANGES

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*Abstract: This paper describes and explains the development of English in general and especially the English lexicon as the influence of social changes from time to time. We know that English can be divided into three periods; the period from 450 to 1100 is known as Old English, from 1100 to 1500, is known as Middle English, and the last, from 1500 up to now is known as Modern English. From the three periods it is found that English always develops and changes. The English of each period is different from the English of other periods.*

*Key words: old English, middle English, modern English lexicon.*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is intended to describe and explain the development of the English in general and specifically the English lexicon as the influence of the social and cultural changes from time to time. Discussing the lexicon development and changes we cannot separate it from the development and changes of the language in general. So before the discussion of the development and changes of English

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lexicon in details it is better to discuss the development and changes of English in general as the influence of the social and cultural changes in England.

All languages in the world develop and change. A language is developing from time to time, and from generations to generations. Speakers of a certain language cannot prevent the language they speak from developing or changing. (O' Grady, Dobrovolsky, Katamba 1996:315). And the development and the change of the language is not only on the lexicon, but it can be on the other elements of the linguistics, and the causes of the changes various, such as; the political, social, cultural and technological development.

But the problem is that, whether the development of the language can be directly observed (Wardhough 190:187). According to Wardhough, it is the genuine characteristic of a language, that a language develops, and the process is for centuries, so it is impossible to observe it directly, since the age of a man is limited. Something which can be observed and studied are the proofs or the data of the changes, but not every language can give the proofs, only languages which have written documents from era to era, can provide them. The English, Arabic and Javanese belong to those which can be traced, because they have the written document. According to the documents, English can be categorized into three periods. The period from 450 to 1100 is known as Old English, from 110 to 1500, is known as Middle English and the last, from 1500 up to now is known as Modern English (Baugh, 1978).

The English of today reflects many centuries of development and changes. The political and social events had profoundly affected the English. The Christianizing of Britain in 597 brought England into contact with Latin civilization, and made additions to the English Vocabulary. The Scandinavian invasions made considerable mixture of the two peoples and their languages. For two centuries, English

was only used by lower class, while the nobles and those associated with them used French, as the result of the Norman Conquest. In 1066, English regained supremacy as the language of all elements of the population, and it greatly changed in both form and vocabulary. In a similar way the Hundred Years' War, the rise on an important middle class, the Renaissance, the development of English as maritime power, the expansion the British Empire, and the growth of: commerce and industry; of science and literature, had each in its way contributed to make the English language what it is today. And therefore, the development of the English lexicon can be traced and discussed (Baugh and Cable, A History of English Language, 1978).

And we can see one of the proofs of the development or changes of the English from Fronkin and Rodman (1974: 191 – 193). The following is the example development of English from the Old English, Middle English and Modern English.

Old English

Nu seulon herian-rices weard.

(Now we must praise heaven-kingdom's Guardian)

weore wulder faeder swa he wundra gehwaes

(the work of the glory-father when he of wonders of every one)

Middle English (The Canterbury Tales by Chaucer)

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soate.

(When April with its sweet showers).

The drought of March hath parced to the roo.

(The drought of March has pierced to the root).

Modern English (Shakespeare)

The summoning of Everyman it is

That of our lives and ending shows

How transitory we be all day

The matter is wonder precious

But the intent of it is more gracious

And sweet bear away

## **THE DEVELOPMENT AND THE CHANGE OF ENGLISH LEXICON**

Wardhough (1990) states there are two kinds of language change; internal change and; external change. The internal change is the change in the language itself for example, the change of the phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon. And the external change happens because of the effect of the influence from outside such as: borrowing, phonemic changes from other languages and so on.

The word change is usually meant by the change of the rule, and it can be whether it is just a revision of the rule, the lost of the rule, or the coming of the new rule, and those can be on the linguistic: phonology, morphology, lexicon and others. From those changes, lexicon change is the easiest to observe, so in this paper the discussion is just focused on the lexicon change. Lexicon change can be on the addition of new words, the lost of old words, and the change of word meanings.

### **A. The Addition of New Words**

Technological innovations or cultural contacts with other regions and countries mostly influence the addition of new words. The development and change in a certain society also affects lexical gaps in its language, and it also influences the addition of new words in the language they use. The addition of new words in a language can be adapted by a process of *word formation* and *borrowing*. And it also happens in English.

### **B. Word Formation**

There are many kinds of word formations: compounding, derivation, conversion, blending, backformation, clipping and

acronym, but among those formations, compounding and derivation are the most dominant.

English speakers always use compounding and derivation to form new words in their speeches. We can see the proofs as in the examples taken from the book entitled “Contemporary Linguistic: An Introduction” (O’Grady, Dobrovolsky and Katamba, 1996).

N → N	sunbeam	'sunbeam'
A → N	middelnight	'midnight'
N → A	blodread	'bloodred'
A → A	deadboren	'stillborn'

**Table 1:**  
Compounding

[baec] V + ere	→	baecere	'baker'
[freond] N + scipe	→	freonscipe	'friendship'
[cild] N + isc	→	cildise	'childish'

**Table 2:**  
Derivation

### C. Borrowing

A long language contact can create a source of *borrowing words*. Borrowing can be classified into three influences: substratum, adstratum, and superstratum. Substratum influence is an influence of a non-dominant language politically or culturally to a dominant language in a certain region. Like American English and Canadian English which borrow many words from Amerindian, substratum Celtic also add some words into English, especially on names of places such as: *Thames, London, and Dover*.

Subvention	→	'subsidy'
Metro	→	'subway'
Autoroute	→	'highway'

**Table 3:**  
The influence of French on Montreal English

Adstratum influence is the effect of a two language contact, but either of the two is politically or culturally more dominant. In the early of the history of Rnglish, 800 A.D., there was a substantive contact among English speakers and Scandinavian speakers which created adstratum influence. And now it is difficult for speakers of English to recognize which words are borrowed from Scandinavian without consulting dictionaries. Look at table 4.

anger, cake, call, fellow, gear, get, hit, husband, low,  
lump, raise, root,  
score, seat, skill, skin, take, their, they, thrust, ugly,  
window, and wing.

**Table 4:**

**Borrowing Words from Scandinavian**

Suprastratum influence is the influence of a culturally or politically dominant language to one or more languages in a certain region, for example Swahili borrows many terms or words from English: major → meya, judge → jaji, officer → afisa, court → korti and many others.

The strong superstratum influence of Norwegian French on the English words happened long time ago, when Norwegian conquered England in 1066. The conquerors spoke French and they were dominant culturally or politically, so the England people had to speak French when they communicated to them. In the following decades, when the conquerors and their generations began to learn to speak English, they remain to use French terms on politic, law, and culture. And in turn, those French words, which they thought more superior, were borrowed by the native speakers of English. And it is not surprising that the borrowing words were developed not only on politic, law and culture but also on other field such as; religion, war, etc. Look at table 5.

Administration : tax, revenue, royal, state, parliament,  
authority, prince, etc.

Religion	: prayer, sermon, chapel, chaplain, friar, etc.
Court	: judge, defendant, jury, evidence, jail, verdict, crime.
Science	: physician, medicine, etc.
Culture	: art, sculpture, fashion, satin, fur, ruby, etc.
War	: army, navy, battle, soldier, enemy, captain, etc.

**Table 5:**  
Borrowing Words from French

For a certain reason, for example to show politeness or others, some French words are used interchangeably with English words. For example; the English word *theft* is used for a light crime, and the French word *larceny* is used for a big crime; the English word *eat* actually has the same meaning as the French word *dine*, but to show politeness the word *dine* is used.

English has its own terms to tell about animals, but it borrows French when it tells about the meat. English, which is said to be rich in vocabulary, has about 600,000 vocabularies now, is because of its flexibility in borrowing words from any language in the world. See table 6.

English/animal	French/meat
Cow	beef
calf	veal
sheep	mutton
pig	pork

**Table 6**  
Borrowing words from French about meat

Italian	: motto, artichoke, balcony, casino, mafia, malaria, etc.
Spain	: comrade, tornado, cannibal, mosquito, banana, guitar, vigilante, marijuana, etc.

- Germany : poodle, noodle, kindergarten, seminar, pretzel, etc.  
 Dutch : sloop, slaw, smuggle, gin, cookie, boom, etc.  
 Australian : boomerang, dingo, koala, billabong, kangaroo, etc.  
 Indian : nirvana, cot, curry, paddy, tattoo, juggernaut, thug, etc.  
 Amerindian: toboggan, opossum, parka, wigwam, chipmunk, etc.

**Table 7:**  
 Borrowings from other Languages

#### D. The Lost of Old Words

As the influence of social and cultural change in the old days, a language did not only gain new vocabularies but also lost its old vocabularies and it also happened in English. When we read *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, we will find some English words, which have disappeared or are not used anymore. For example: *beseem* = to be suitable, *mammet* = a doll or puppet, *wot* = to know, *gives* = fetters, *fain* = rather, and *wherefor* = why. For some other examples see table 8.

dolghot	→	compensation for wounding
peox	→	hunting spear
eafor	→	tenant obligation to the king to convey goods
flytme	→	a blood letting instrument

**Table 8:**  
 Warn-out words

#### E. The Change of Lexical Meaning

The change of semantic is usually on the slowly change of the lexical meaning, it can be; total lexical meaning, broadening lexical

meaning, narrowing lexical meaning, weakening lexical meaning, ameliorative and pejorative. See the following tables.

Word	Original meaning	New meaning
bead	say one's prayer	small ball of wood, glass, etc.
knight	(Ind. sembahyang) man	(Ind. tasbih) man on whom a title of honor conferred
silly	(pemuda) happy	(ksatria) stupid

**Table 9:**  
Total Lexical Meaning Change

Word	Original meaning	New meaning
holiday	sacred day (hari suci)	day of rest from work (hari libur)
picture	drawing	photo, movie

**Table 10 :**  
The Broadening Lexical Meaning (Semantic Broadening)

Word	Original meaning	New meaning
hound	any dog	a hunting breed
meat	any type of food	flesh of an animal
fowl	any bird	a domesticated bird
disease	any unfavorable state	an illness

**Table 11:**  
Narrowing Lexical Meaning

Word	Original meaning	New meaning
pretty knight	tricky, sly, cunning boy	attractive a m a n o f honorable military rank

**Table 12.:**  
Ameliorative Lexical Meaning (becoming better)

Word	Original meaning	New meaning
silly wench girl	happy, prosperous prostitute, wanton	foolish woman

**Table 13:**  
Pejorative Lexical Meaning (becoming worse)

Word	Original meaning	New meaning
wreak crucify quell	avenge, punish kill by nailing to a cross kill, murder	to cause, inflict to cause pain to put down, pacify

**Table 14.:**  
Weakening Lexical Meaning (less meaning)

## CONCLUSION

It is right as stated by Katamba and Wardhough in the introduction that a language is changing from time to time. And of course, it happens to English. English of a thousand years ago was different from the English of five hundred years ago, and so the English of today will be different from the English of the fourth millennium due to the influence of social and cultural changes.

So from the discussion and explanation above, it can be concluded that all languages in the world, are always developing and changing, either internally or externally. The changes cover all

linguistic levels such as: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantic, and lexicon. Among those changes semantic and lexicon are the most common and easily seen.

Lexicon change can be: the addition of new words, the lost of old words, and the change of the meaning of words. The addition of new words comprise: the new word formation and word borrowing. The lost of the old words can be permanent or may come into use in a certain period. Whereas the meaning change can be: broadening, weakening, ameliorative, pejorative lexical meaning. And all those happen because of the influence or the effect of social and cultural changes in the society.

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