



WORD-FORMATION AND ENGLISH IDIOMS

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ABSTRACT

Language is used in human affairs as it is an effective medium of communication. It grows in the course of time adopting itself to the changing situations and needs of the society. Language is passed from one generation to the next one. It is a vehicle to express once feelings, to give information or to state facts. Language is the only characteristic that distinguishes human beings from other animals. Language has fascinated philosophers, scientists, technocrats, diplomats, thinkers and poets for thousands of years. Language, though ubiquitous, people seem to be unaware of its pervasiveness. Philosophers and linguists have studied language from various angles and tried to define it. They have taken into account its various aspects such as structural or functional. It is also studied from sociolinguistic point of view or keeping human mind at the centre. Hence there have been many definitions of language focussing its nature or function. Language is also a means to preserve culture. It is passed from one generation to the next one, while adopting itself to the changing situations and needs of the society. It also grows in the course of time that's why it is called a living thing.

INTRODUCTION

Words are building blocks. The more words a language contains, the richer it becomes. Some languages grow richer because they go on continuously adding new words to their existing vocabulary. So, the minting of words is an ever going process in any living language.

Technology, various trends in fashion, politics, economics and sports generate new words. Another way of increasing word stock of a language is some word formation processes. Some of the processes are very productive, whereas others are not that productive.

Affixation, conversion and compounding are three major word formation processes. These process help derive many more words from existing words. In newspapers and magazines one encounters many new words as they attract the attention of readers. Technological development, inventions of new gadgets and instruments, and growing needs to express new concepts give rise to coining words. With the advent of the internet, cell phones and electronic gadgets, there came a flood of new words which can be seen used in the papers and the magazines. In any new dictionary whose new edition comes out after every five to six years, new words find their way into it.

Given the development in every field, it is not surprising: ‘the vocabulary of English’ has hugely increased during 20th century. (Crystal: 2006).

Affixation

There are four major types of word formation processes: prefixation, suffixation, compounding and conversion. Minor word formation processes include clipping, blends, borrowings (loan words). (Greenbaum: 1996)

Affixes are bound morphemes and are attached either to the beginning or to the end of a base. Affixes are of two types: one type is called prefixes and the other one suffix. Prefixes are of various types such as negative prefixes, reversative prefixes, pejorative prefixes, locative prefixes. Some prefixes show, size, attitude, time and order.

An ‘e-’ is a recently coined prefix which has been exploited widely to form e-mail, e-commerce, e-cigarette, e-book, e-learning, etc.

a. Negative prefixes are:

dis- (order, obey, use)
in - (complete, attention, sane,)
un- (fair, wise, forgettable,)

b. Reversative prefixes are:

dis- (connect, infect, own),
un- (mask, seat, wrap,)

c. Pejorative prefixes are:

mal- (nutrition, formed, treat)

mis- (calculate, fire, lead),

Suffixation

Suffixes are attached to the end of a base. They are also various types but they change the word class of the bases to which they are attached. So suffixes are conveniently classified as nouns suffixes, verb suffixes, adjective suffixes, adverb suffixes.

a. Noun suffixes are:

- dom (king, free, bore)
- hood (boy, brother, widow)
- ship (friend, member, professor)

b. Adjective suffixes are:

- an (Russia, India, Shakespeare)
- y (wealth, health, sand)
- ful (pity, help, use)

c. Verb suffixes are:

- en (rich, courage, rage)
- ize/-ise (hospital, legal, modern)

d. Adverb suffixes are:

- ly (calm, coward, bad)
- ward(s) (earth, north, down)
- wise (clock, scab, cross)

Conversion

Conversion is a process of derivation, which is used to change a word class of words without changing their form or adding an affix. The recent example is 'google' which is a noun, but can also be used as a verb, just like 'twitter'. Merriam Webster's dictionary declared 'ism', which is a noun suffix, is 2015 word of the year. It is an affix but became a noun.

Compounding

Compounding involves two free stems that stand alone as independent words.

For example 'website', 'chat room', 'facebook', 'me time', 'digital detox'.

Minor word formation process is often used to make up words.

Blends

Blend is a minor word process in which joins the shortened forms of two words together.

Recent blends are: webisode, sexting, jeggings, informania, bling, phablet, infoment, emoticon, emoji, phubbing

Loan words

Words borrowed from another language are called loan words. Usually a loan word is used as it is without giving its translation and the reason may be unavailability of synonymous word. Also some words are culture-specific, whose synonyms cannot be available in a target language.

Most languages, when they come into one another's contact, borrow words from other languages. According to Crystal the term:

"Borrowing' is not appropriate 'as the words are not given back at a later stage" (Crystal: 2008).

Examples of borrowing are dindi, sammelan, Poona, topi, avatar, mantra, shampoo etc. Some words acquire new meaning which is labelled as 'semantic shifts'. The net related words have taken on new meanings for example, mouse, post, wall, like, handle, etc.

Idiom

Idioms form very important part of everyday spoken English. Though they are used in spoken English or in informal English, it is not unusual to use them in written English. Idioms are abundantly used in newspapers and magazines. The demarcating line between spoken and written English seems to be getting fuzzier in them. Every language has idioms and English, being a very rich language, abounds in them. They make English more colourful and vivid by creating images to convey meaning that goes beyond individual words. Idioms are often used to express a complicated idea very clearly, otherwise to express the same idea one would have to expend hundreds of words. Idioms can be compared to a picture, which tells everything in a nutshell. That is why they have become a part of everyday conversation. Idioms have come from diverse of sources such as from the Bible and Shakespeare to Paris

terror attack in November 2015 and from mythology to modern slang, and from Homer to P.G.Woodhouse and Arundhati Roy.

Idioms are ubiquitous. A reader comes across them after every two-three sentences. There cannot be hardly any newspaper or magazine which does not use idioms profusely. To understand English, spoken and written, knowing idioms is of utmost importance. As language changes in the course of time, idioms are immune to change and remain unaffected. They are like 'antic pieces' or 'artefacts' passed on generation to generation.

It is considered that the use of idioms is not good in writing and they should be avoided since they are obstacles in our way to understanding. But it is also observed that newspapers, magazines make copious use more idioms in their articles on various fields in order to make them more interesting and readable.

What is an Idiom?

Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 5th edition defines an idiom as:

a form of expression, grammatical construction, phrase, etc., peculiar to a person or language; a phrase etc. which is understood by speakers of particular language despite its meaning's not being predictable from that of separate words.

The New Penguin Dictionary also defines an idiom.

An idiom is an expression that has become establish in a language that has a meaning that cannot be derived from the meaning of its individual elements.

According to Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 12th edition,

An idiom is a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of individual words.

The definitions given above indicate that idioms are fixed expressions. They are not easy to understand from individual words used in them. On the contrary, a meaning of an idiom is altogether different and cannot be figured out from individual words. A whole idiom functions as a single lexeme and just knowing the meanings of individual words does not help much in working out the meaning of that idiom, which makes second language learning difficult for non-native speakers and using them appropriately still more difficult.



Formation of Idioms

Idioms have originated from various fields but they are mostly rooted in a culture and help us to have a look into the history, culture and even to gather the outlook of persons who use them. Most of the idioms have also developed over time from social practices, beliefs, rites, rituals and even superstitions prevalent in different cultures. As a culture changes so do words to reflect the change in culture. But idioms stubbornly live on and do not fall out of use. On the contrary, new idioms are being added continuously.

If we want to be familiar with social life led by American and British people, then idioms throw light on their farming, ploughing, harvesting crops. The equipment for tilling land was plough. Other tools used by them to till the land were rake, spade, etc. Many idioms related to farming found in English. There are many other idioms that described farm animals such as sheep, lambs, cows, bulls, pigs, etc. formed. To know about the culture means to know about tools and weapons used by people, foods they ate and clothes they put on, work they used to do etc. Even their social practices help to have an insight into their social life. In the past more people had to work in their fields and there were no motor cars. Only one means of transport was the horse. That's why many idioms relate to horses and carts as there was no development. They used carts pulled by horses or other animals. All these things gave rise to various expressions which acquired metaphoric meaning in the course of time.

In short, the study of society, region in which it lived, animals, birds, vegetables, fruits found in an area help us to understand idioms. Because idioms have originated from across all walks of life.

Beat about the bush is a very common idiom frequently used. Even though the meaning of the verb 'beat' and the noun 'bush' is not difficult to gather, yet the meaning of the idiom cannot be surmised. Its origin is in the shooting or catching birds in a net. Hunt beaters were hired to thrash the bushes so that frightened birds would come out of thicket and the hunter would easily shoot them. This is the story behind the idiom which helps us to make sense of the meaning of the idiom, the idiom means to discuss a matter in a roundabout way or without coming to the point. By extension it means waste time ineffectually.

Americans and the English used to put on hats as part of the dress. Putting hats on was a common practice in these countries to protect themselves from cold weather. It was upper class people who wore hats. Gradually, wearing hats fell by the wayside in the course of time. Taking hats off was a custom to show respect to someone superior in status. Also, this gesture was looked on as good manners for men. They took their hats off or touched the brim of them whenever a woman entered the room. Hence, the idiom *hats off to somebody* means to show admiration for them. Today, no American or English person any longer wears a hat but the

idiom is still used in English. Anyone not familiar with the culture of Americans or the English might get perplexed after reading this idiom or watching a person touching the brim of his hat in any American or English novel or films.

There are certain things common to every culture such as art, music, money, business, etc. So we find some idioms in some cultures. Water is available everywhere and in great quantity. So we find many idioms with water in other languages also such as *like water* is found in English, Hindi, and Marathi languages. Idiom *water under the bridge* is in Marathi too. *Be rolling in money* is another idiom found in English as well as in Marathi.

Idioms are derived from, drama, dance, music, sports, food, fruits, vegetables, etc.

- i) Drama: *behind the scenes, to make a scene, to come on the scene*
- ii) Music: *to call the tune, to strike a chord, out of tune with, sing a different tune*
- iii) Sports: i) Boxing: *to pull one's punches, to win a round, to pack a punch*
ii) Cricket: *to catch out, to play a straight bat, to bat for, to be stumped, its not cricket*
iii) Football: *to kick up a fuss, to kick up a stink, move the goal posts*
- iv) Food: *food for thought, a big cheese, a bad egg, one's bread and butter, to be in a jam,*
- v) Fruits: *to go bananas, sour grapes, a second bite of the cherry,*
- vi) Vegetables: *hot potatoes, like two peas in a pod, hold out a carrot*

Even the Bible and great literature had great impact on the cultures we live in. The Bible has been translated into many languages. There are many idioms taken from the Bible. There are great writers whose translated works have been read all over the world.

Among the masters of literatures who have contributed to English literature, the name of Shakespeare is at the top. He has added many words and idioms to English literature. Many of Shakespeare's idioms and phrases have become household words in English. His plays Henry IV, Hamlet, Twelfth Night, have many more idioms coined by Shakespeare. They include *Hoist with his own petard, the slings and arrows, there is the rub, it's Greek to me, to speak draggers, one's pound of flesh*, etc. are still used in spoken and written English.

Some fearful and horrible natural calamities like floods, earthquake, volcano and other hazards inflicted by men that shocked the world also have thrown up idioms.



On 11th September 2001 a hijacked plane was rammed into the world trade centre building in New York then the second one was also flown into the other building, sending crashing them down. This was the most brazen terror attack on the twin towers. This event was gave two idioms *9/11* and *the ground zero*.

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