

The Lexical Expansion Of The Renaissance: Exuberance and Restraint

General Features of the Renaissance:

- exuberance, excitement and expansion of words, books and literature caused by the invention of the book print
- William Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde introduced presses to London in 1476 and 1491
- Number of books increased rapidly to more than 800 in 1534 (death of de Worde) and to more than 20000 in 1640
- In literature this period is called Early Modern English
- Major literary development is: the drama
- Expanding vocabulary
- growing notion of a standard form,
- increase of grammatical flexibility:
- conversion of words i.e. the noun “champion” was firstly used as a verb became popular
- i. e. Shakespeare and Queen Elizabeth used their own style
- 1574 censorship was introduced to ban bawdy language

The Expanding vocabulary and the Inkhorn Controversy

- Two major sources for new vocabulary (borrowings), European Languages and Overseas Languages
- French (mostly military words): pioneer, colonel, machine
- Spanish (overseas words): cannibal, negro, potato, banana
- Italy: carnival, artichoke, signor and also literary terms like sonnet or stanza
- Vocabulary expanded mostly from 1500 to 1700 but the number of books increased later, see graph page 153
- First traditional dictionary was published in 1604
- Inkhorn Controversy: large amount of new words that caused confusion
- Purists rejected foreign borrowings totally
- Neologizers welcomed the new foreign words

Lexical Variation in Elizabethan Prose

“The Book of Common Prayer” (1549)

- register: mostly native terms or already established borrowings
- main aim: tries to be a source for both extremes

King James Bible (Authorized Version; 1611)

- seen as one of the most important prose work of the Renaissance
- translated by four committees, who worked on King James’s command
- took over many parts of Tyndale’s translation, used the Anglo – Saxon word - stock
- partly led to semantic change (e. g. *mighty* = famine)

Tyndale's translation of the Bible

- main aim: give common people access to the Word of God
- uses almost only native terms
- Tyndale was executed and his work was prohibited later on

Richard Hooker: "Of the laws of Ecclesiastical Polity" (1593)

- topic: vision of a natural catastrophe ("breakdown in the laws of nature") and its consequences for human life
- register: juxtaposes Latin loanwords (high reg.) and very simple native terms
(e.g.: *confused mixture, disordered*)

Gabriel Harvey: "Robert Greene" (1592)

- topic: portrait of a low-grade entertainer
- register: mixture of classical terms and underground slang



all works combine low with high registers, which is a typical feature of the Elizabethan literature

- reveals the contradictory opinions; effect: satirical and ironic style, makes it possible to criticize specific fashions (e.g. smoking)

Francis Bacon: "The Advancement of Learning" (1605)

- topic: critique on the debate about language and words; he is more concerned with the meaning itself

Antony Bacon

- very interested in science and scientific language, translated works of Roman authors
- uses their style: points out briefly the major points
- register: 35 per cent are adopted, classical borrowings
- ⇒ makes his works sound very modern

Robert Burton: "The Anatomy of Melancholy" (1621)

- just the opposite of the Bacon brothers
- his work is seen as an "*old book*", as it includes various fairy – tale like descriptions; is not straight to the point, the text is considered to be even exhausting and long – winded

Edmund Spenser

- a poet, who was ambitious to write in an archaic way to recreate the medieval atmosphere (e.g.: "*The Fairie Queen*")
- coined words (e.g.: *bellibone* from French *belle et bonne*), portmanteux (e.g.: *scruze* from *screw* and *squeeze*)
- he took over several terms of Chaucer and misinterpreted them
- "pseudo – archaism" (Sir Walter Scott, 1820)
- regardless the debate because of these errors, his "new" words were established within the language (e.g.: *blatant*)

The Play's the Thing

- first playhouse build in 1576
- three major dramatists: Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare

Marlowe

- due to his education he was a master in using the classical, very high register; but one has also to admit his lack of creativity
- in his plays (e.g.: *Tamburlaine the Great*) he enabled the heroes to break the boundaries of tradition
- he accommodates the language to the specific character or situation
- there are frequent mentionings of classical names
- the more dramatic the situation within a play becomes, the more complicated the terms are

Shakespeare

- very important contribution of new words into language; exploitation of language to its limits
- master of juxtaposing different registers (e.g.: classical vs. native terms; rare vs. very simple terms)
- uses only few classical names; when they are mentioned, they are described in a satirical and ironic style
- sometimes very arrogant and vain terms dominate specific monologues (e.g.: *Hamlet*); this caused two labels: *bombast* and *fustian*, to express this kind of language use and its meaning
- the most dramatic and tragic moments are written in a very simple language (e.g.: death)
- as Shakespeare did not provide his own opinion regarding his status it is very difficult to state his position
 - his contemporaries have given different statements to this question
 - Shakespeare's own position becomes visible with the help of his plays and various monologues

Ben Jonson

- wrote several comedies and two tragedies
- tries to represent the typical city life, its atmosphere and therefore also its language
 - rude, voyeur – like kind of language; human behaviour is compared with animalistic images
- makes fun of classical heroes (e.g.: *Cicero = Tully, Tullius*)

John Milton (1608-74)

- his work represents the final flowering of the Renaissance
- probably the most learned man of his age
- after pondering the possibility of writing his “magnum opus” in Latin, he decided to create a specially elevated form of English for his poem
- he went the same route as Marlowe before him, exploiting the magnificently sonorous and weighty quality of the classical elements of the lexis
- he created verse paragraphs, great building blocks of verse, although even individual lines convey the sound of his “organ voice”
- Milton later created his poems aloud, due to his blindness -> made him more sensitive to the sound qualities of words
- T.S. Eliot called that Milton's “auditory imagination”, a compensation for his blindness
- Milton's use of classical terms was conservative: he used “orient” to mean “bright”, “horrent” to mean “bristling”, “reluctant” to mean “struggling” and “sublime” to mean “lofty” or “raised aloft”

- A number of terms are first found in his work e.g. gloom (in the modern sense of darkness), horrent, impassive, irresponsible, etc.
- At a time when spelling was becoming fixed Milton went the direction of phonetic simplicity
- Milton's poetic vocabulary represents the furthest degree of Latinization, which led others like Wordsworth and Keats to unwilling imitation

The Language of Science

- great lexical expansion with the help of borrowing of classical and foreign words
- major growth of interest in science in the Renaissance led to considerable borrowing of specialist terms from the classical languages and from Arabic
- "science" itself dates from late ME, 1340 -> it meant knowledge there, derived from Latin "scientia"
- today the word is widely applied to a whole variety of fields, such as life sciences, human sciences, earth sciences and so on
- other essential terms defining the scientific method, with corresponding dates are:

problem (Greek) 1382
 solution (Latin) 1375
 experiment (Latin) 1362
 idea (Greek) 1531
 method (Greek) 1541
 etc.

- the powerful influence of science is shown by the fact that all these words are now common and have generalized meanings
- other terms describing whole branches of knowledge, which entered the vocabulary from the medieval period onwards are:

astronomy (Greek) 1205
 arithmetic (Greek) 1250
 medicine (Latin) 1320
 philosophy (Greek) 1340
 logic (Greek) 1362
 grammar (Greek) 1262
 etc.

- the lexical growth of scientific terms is demonstrated perfectly with the "bio-compounds", which include: biochemistry (1881), biophysics (1892), biopsy (1895), biosphere (1899), biometric (1901), biomechanics (1933) and bionics (1960).

Professional Language: The Parts of the Body in Medical Lexis

- the human body, as defined by the polite native vocabulary, has notable concentrations and omissions
- the head is well covered with: head, hair, brow, eye, ear, nose, nostril, cheek, mouth, teeth and tongue → all Anglo-Saxon words just like the upper and lower extremities
- when we come to terms for the sexual or excretory organs and for bodily functions there are notable gaps which are filled by either high-register technical terms

- that was not always the case: a study of medieval medical texts such as Lanfrank's "Cirurgery" c.1400 and "The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac" c.1425 show that core words now regarded as grossly impolite were previously acceptable as medical terminology
- for example in Wycliffe's contemporary translation of the bible the graphic term "arse-ropes" can be found for "intestines"
- several native terms of basic physicality have become obsolete, for example "yard" was a basic word for "penis" in medieval times and the old word for "testicle" was "stone" (e.g. stone-horse for stallion)
- all in all, it is a valid generalization to claim that all the available "four-letter" words were used in medical contexts up to about 1500.
- C.S. Lewis made the observation that "As soon as you deal with it [i.e. Sex] explicitly, you are forced to choose between the language of the nursery, the gutter and the anatomy class (in Tynan, 1975, p.154)
- Historically what has occurred is that the old terminology has been driven out of the accepted usage into obsolescence, the farmyard or the gutter
- Virtually all new terms of medicine style themselves in Greek terminology (psychiatry, gynaecology, etc)
- The only branch of medicine with an Anglo-Saxon name is midwifery, steadily being forced out by "obstetrics"

The Language of the Law

- the word "law" is of Scandinavian origin
- the earliest extant Anglo-Saxon legislation is found in the laws of Ine, King of Wessex, announced between 688 and 695
- legal terminology acquired an alien register from the time when the Norman overlords used their standard practice of defining themselves and all aspects of their rule in their own terms, so the direct terminology used in the Anglo-Saxon laws had been forced out
- "capital crime" words are an exception: murder and manslaughter are of Germanic origin
- generally there are consequently developed parallel vocabularies of broad, general, native words and specific alien technical terms
- Later came the infiltration of law Latin in the form of numerous phrases like habeas corpus, prima facie, quid pro quo, inter alia, etc.
- Due to the complexity of this a so called "Plain English campaign" came up, which has continued to focus on the languages of medicine and the law