

The Twenty-First Century (drawn from class handout)

Semantics: the study of meanings and the development of meanings; an exploration of how English language continues to evolve to accommodate our changing society.

New Words From Old

1. Generalization: an extension of meaning ('aisle' originally referred only to the passageway between pews in a church)

2. Restriction (or specialization): a word develops a more limited sense ('hound' once referred to any breed of dog, but now applies specifically to one kind; 'starve' once meant 'to die' but now refers specifically to death by lack of food)

(see Exercise 10.7; class handout)

3. degeneration (or pejoration): A. a gradual extension of meaning so that any particular meaning is lost ('great' once meant 'large in size' but can now refer to anything perceived favorably) B. a specific meaning is retained, but one less favorable ('reek' once meant 'smoke,' but now means 'stink')

4. regeneration (or amelioration): a word is viewed more favorably than previously ('snob' used to be considered an extreme insult but now has less vile connotations)

(see Exercise 10.8 class handout)

5. specialized class usage: a shift in meaning from one social group to another (contemporary teenage slang is usually full of examples; 'bae,' 'on fleek,' and 'basic')

6. contextual variation: a shift in meaning from one set of circumstances to another ('park' originally referred to canons; not only has the context changed, but the word has also generalized)

7. shift in point of view: a change in the aspect of which a word focuses ('attic' originally referred to an upright garret on a roof, but later came to denote the room directly under a window)

(see 10.9.4 class handout)

8. popularization: technical language becomes accessible and popularized ('input' originally referred to data entered into a computer; the word now refers to any information, advice, or opinion)

(see 10.10 class handout)

9. abstraction: a concrete reference becomes abstract ('house' refers not only to a physical building, but also to the act of providing shelter)

10. concretization: an abstract reference becomes concrete ('complexion' once referred to temperament and character, but now refers more concretely to one's physical coloring)

(see 10.11, class handout)

13. objectification: a subjective word becomes objective ('pitiful' once meant 'full of pity' but no, more objectively, means 'one deserving pity')

14. subjectification: a word shifts from the objective to the subjective ('knowledgeable' once meant 'capable of being known,' as in "Calculus is a knowledgeable subject." Now, it means having knowledge about, as in "I am knowledgeable about Calculus.")

(see 10.12 class handout)

15. metaphor: a shift in meaning based on a likeness between two things ('root' refers not only to the roots of a tree, but, metaphorically speaking, one can also get to the 'root' of a problem)

16. synesthesia: a shift in meaning from one sense to another ('taste' not only refers to eating, but one have a 'taste' for art or architecture)

17. synecdoche: the whole is referred to by a part, or vice versa (we may refer to any soft drink as a coke)

18. metonymy: using an attribute of something for the thing itself (we may refer to a business man as a suit, or we may refer to a car as a 'ride')

19. clang association: a semantic association between two words due to a similarity in sound ('chaise longue,' a French borrowing, was originally 'chaise longue') (likewise, 'fortuitous,' meaning "by chance," is often used as a synonym for 'fortunate' due to their similar sounds, and 'buxom,' originally meaning "obedient," developed an association with 'bosom')

20. hyperbole: exaggeration for emphasis (if we are bit late getting lunch, we might say "I'm starving!")

(see 10.16 class handout)

Word Formation Processes:

1. creation:

A. root creation: a coined word (examples include googol and nylon)

B. echoic words, or onomatopoeia

C. symbolic words: words that share a common meaning and a common sound (tweak, twiddle, twinkle, twist *or* crack, cramp, cripple, crooked, crouch)

D. ejaculations (ahem, pssst, ha ha)

2. combining

A. affixation (using prefixes and suffixes to create new words)

B. compounds (When should compound nouns be hyphenated? We have no specific rules, but a fully joined compound word has likely been in the language longer than one that is hyphenated or separate.)

C. amalgamated compounds (nostril, daisy, doff, nickname, gossip)

3. shortening

A. clipped form (cinema, chat, prom, radio)

B. back formation: reverses the usual word-building process by removing, rather than adding, units of meaning (escalate, babysit, panhandle, diagnose)

C. initialisms: these include alphabetisms (AT&T, TV, RSVP, WTOC, IQ) and acronyms (USAFA, snafu, futhorc, scuba)

4. blending (smog, brunch, simulcast, alcoholiday)

folk etymology: blending that results from a naïve misunderstanding, or false etymology, of a foreign or difficulty expression (chaise lounge, rosemary, chester drawers, Archie Fisher snow)

5. shifting

A. commonization: a proper noun becomes common (coke, kleenex, xerox)

B. eponymy: a type of commonization in which a name becomes a common name (leotard, maloney, tkatchev, jaeger)

C. popularization: specialized speech and slang that becomes popularized (vlog, bro-hug)

D. euphemism

E. functional shift: one part of speech becomes another (vlog begins as a noun, but later, we may begin to use it as a verb)