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The Development of English Vocabularies

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Abstract

Vocabularies are important parts of all languages across the globe. When vocabularies develop through human communication, the language is considered as a living language instead of a dead language. English is a living language that undergoes some developments both in grammar and vocabularies. Those developments include pronunciation, spelling, and meaning that occur in every period, that is to say, Old English, Middle English, and Modern English. In addition, English has cosmopolitan and resourcefulness characteristics. English is a cosmopolitan language since it borrows and adopts some vocabularies from other languages. Resourcefulness means that English undergoes some affixation through derivation and inflection. This article discusses the metamorphoses of English vocabularies in several periods.

Keywords: Vocabulary; Cosmopolitan; Resourcefulness; Living Language; Affixation.

1. Introduction

Language is a human's innate capacity that differentiates them from other creatures. Language becomes human being characteristics since they use it to communicate ideas, thought, and feelings^[1],^[5]. It is a means to conduct a transaction in business as well as in government administration; it can also be used to transfer knowledge from generation to generation^[2]. English as an international language has broader roles. Beside of its function as international language, English has a long historical record that worth considering. The history of a language cannot be separated from the history of its vocabularies. Its vocabularies have undergone some changes or developments in a particular period including the Old English, the Middle English, and the Modern English.

2. Method

This article is composed by utilizing library research since this paper looks carefully on the issue through the study of literature. There are some references that are carefully investigated to gather related manuscripts and supported information needed for the completion of this article. A wide range of literature selection will then be arranged for its importance. The older literature is taken for historical reference purposes, while the current literature is chosen for the actualization of discussion.

3. Results and Discussion

Vocabulary is an important part of a language. As long as language is used for human communication, the language will remain as a living language. A language that is no longer used as a means of communication is considered as a dead language. English is a living language that undergoes some developments in terms of its grammar and vocabulary. Grammar in the Old English is somehow different from that of the Modern English^[2]. Grammar includes verb, gender, and type of language. The numbers of irregular verbs in Old English are larger than that of the regular

verb. On the contrary, the number of regular verbs in Modern English is greater than the irregular verbs. Old English manifested gender in its noun, article, and adjective which is no longer used in Modern English. In Modern English, all nouns are considered as neutral and genderless. Old English belongs to synthetic language and Modern English is grouped into analytic language. Synthetic language uses inflection as the rule of its grammar and analytic language uses word-order such as the order of subject, predicate, object, and adverb.

The development of Old English vocabularies can be traced back from the pronunciation differences and spelling of Old English and Modern English as it is depicted by following examples. Old English vocabularies example are “cu”, “hâlig”, and “gân”, while in Modern English period the vocabularies are changed into “cow”, “holy”, and “go”.

Beside of its pronunciation and spelling, the semantic meaning of Old English is also different from that of the modern ones. “Nice”, for example, means ‘good’ in Modern English but in Old English it is defined as “foolish”. The development of English vocabularies relates to the history of English and its nation. Baugh states that the history of English focuses on the history of Old English, Middle English, and Modern English ^{[2], [4]}.

A. Old English : 450 – 1150

Before Roman came to Britain, Britain had been inhabited by Celt and they spoke Celt. In 4 AD, Roman under Claudius command started to invade Britain. They overruled the Celt. Celt people then moved to Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Meanwhile, in Britain, Roman had successfully applied Roman law. At this time, Roman authority in Britain started to wobble due to internal disruption in Wales and Scotland. In the end of 410, Roman left Britain and it brought happiness to Celt but it did not last long because some of tribes of Jute, Anglo-Saxon came to Europe. The arrival of Jute and Anglo-Saxon in the middle of five century expelled the Celts. The language used by Jute and Anglo-Saxon is derived from Germanic language, particularly Low German dialect and it is not developed from the native English language that is the Celtic. Thus, most of English vocabularies come from Anglo-Saxon.

It has been acknowledged that the Low German which develops in Britain becomes a new language called English. It is only that the language is closely related to the Germanic language which is far from English today. The language is labeled as Old English. Old English vocabularies are also termed as Native English due to the fact that they are the ancestors of Modern English vocabularies. Those vocabularies, to mention a few are “fæder-father”, “módor-mother”, “fif-five”, “wif-wife”, “çild-child”, “hūs-house”, and “kinn-chin” ^{[2], [4]}. From those examples, it can be seen that there are some differences in pronunciation and spelling of Old English and Modern English.

Some of Old English vocabularies that are still in use today are as following “man”, “woman”, “child”, “eat”, “drink”, “sleep”, “play”, “walk”, “go”, “love”, “life”, and “death”. Those example shows that the most-used vocabularies are derived from Old English. Despite of the fact that Old English vocabularies contribute to the development of Modern English vocabularies, Modern English vocabularies are also affected by Danish. In 866, Danish invaded England and since 877 they occupied Eastern England which is known as Daneslaw and Danish affected English. There are some Danish vocabularies adopted into English at that time. Some Danish words adopted into English are “they”, “their”, “them”, “happy”, “low”, “tight”, “ugly”, “wrong”. “dirt”, “egg”, “law”, and “sky”.

B. Middle English : 1150 - 1500

Since Norman invasion in 1066, Norman who uses France starts to rule in England. France is only used in upper class society and people in general do not use it as a means of communication. Common people still uses English however there are a lot of France words that are adopted into English. This causes the change in pronunciation and spelling of Middle English as shown by the examples below [1] :

Pronunciation	Old English Spelling	Middle English Spelling	Example in Middle English
[kw]	Cw	Qu	queen, quick
[f]	Sc	ss, sch, sh	fiss, fisch, fish
[k]	C	k,c	kinn, cool
[tʃ]	C	Ch	chinn ‘chin’
[s]	S	s,c	cyndre, sindir, cinder, ‘centre’
[g]	Ȝ	G	god, good, ‘good’
[j]	ȝ	ȝ, y	ȝer, yer, yeer, ‘year’
[i:]	ī	i,y	fir, fyr, ‘fire’
[o:]	ō	o, oo	fod, food
[u:]	ū	ou, ow	hous, hows, ‘house’

Almost all of human life aspects are influenced by France vocabularies. At the beginning, only daily vocabularies that are found in daily conversation such as the word “beef”, “mutton”, “pork”, and “veal”. France vocabularies gradually influence all human life aspects in England. In 1154, France vocabularies start to influence English literature. Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400), a well-known classic poet in England with his Canterbury Tales uses a lot of France words. The adoption of those France words into English does not only take place at that moment but it still happens up to 20 century. The word boutique and discotheque are examples of France words that are adopted into English. France words that are adopted into English during 1150-1500 contain words relate to administration and offices, religion, law, military, fashion, food, education, medicine, art, and social life.

In addition to pronunciation and spelling changes as a language phenomenon in the Middle English, the adoption of Latin words into English is also essential. The adoption of Latin words is triggered by The Renaissance from Italy.

C. Modern English: 1500 and Present

In Modern English era, English vocabularies have been standardized through the issue of books and English dictionaries that become the standardized pronunciation or received pronunciations. In this era, grammar is also standardized, for example, the emergence of English Dictionary in 1755 by Dr. Johnson and also Noah Webster in 1828. Later on English Grammar by Robert Lowth in 1762 entitled A Short Introduction to English Grammar [3].

English vocabularies in modern era is acknowledged as cosmopolitan vocabularies because it adopts many words from languages across the globe, for example, those are borrowed from American Indian such as “chipmunk”, “moose”, and “raccoon”. English vocabularies borrowed from Dutch are “brandy”, “golf”, and “wagon”. English vocabularies borrowed from Italy are “opera”, “piano”, and “vulcano”. English vocabularies borrowed from Spanish are “alligator”, “cargo”, and “mosquito”. English vocabularies borrowed from Greek are “acme”, “acrobat”, and “anthology”. English vocabularies borrowed from Russian are “steppe”, “drosky”, and “rubble”. English vocabularies borrowed from Persian are “spinach”, “paradise”, and “jessamine”. There are more and more English vocabularies that are borrowed from other languages, namely, Hebrew, Arabic, Hungarian, Indian, Malay, Chinese, Javanese, Australia, Tahiti, Polynesian, West Africa, and Brazilian [1].

The formation of Old English vocabularies is somehow different from those of modern ones. Old English vocabularies are formed or expanded simply by adding affix to its base. By affixation (adding prefix or suffix), a word may be expanded up to 100 words, this is also called as a resourcefulness Vocabulary. For example, a word *mōd* may be added by suffix and it becomes “*mōdig*”, “*mōdignes*”, “*mōdigian*”, “*mōdfull*”, “*mōdlēas*” by adding prefix, *mōd* becomes “*unmōd*”, “*bēahmōd*”, “*mādmōd*”, “*ofermōd*”. An example of the addition of prefix and suffix are *glæmōdnes* and *gemōdod*. Affixation is commonly found in Modern English vocabularies. Affixation in English only happens approximately on 7-8 words at the most.

4. Conclusion

The development of English vocabularies is marked by the changes in Old English and Modern English in terms of grammar, word origin, pronunciation, and spelling. Old English grammar is very complex due to abundant number of inflections meanwhile Modern English grammar has been simplified since Middle English. Old English vocabularies are mainly adopted from Teutonic, and Modern English vocabularies adopt and borrow from languages across the globe as a consequence, English becomes a cosmopolitan language. The pronunciation and spelling of Old English are different from English today. Old English vocabularies are formed by using affixation in which Old English affixation can expand a word into more than 100 new words which does not exist in Modern English affixation.

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