



## A Study of Lexical Changes in Contemporary English Daily Usage

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### Abstract

Lexical transformation is a constant process in progressive communities and is one of the most obvious examples of language evolution. This phenomenon has long fascinated linguists. Lexical shifts have a significant impact on a language's lexicon, or vocabulary, which is constantly changing. The English language has experienced several phases of development throughout history. Linguistic changes can be classified as internal or external, depending on whether they result from alterations to the language itself or from shifts in the social roles that the language serves. Previous studies have primarily focused on lexical changes in dictionaries or over historical periods,

with minimal consideration given to lexical changes concerning the informal Modern English language or current slang used in everyday life. The study aims to examine lexical changes in contemporary informal English used in everyday speech. The conclusions of the study indicate that modern English has undergone significant changes, particularly in terms of its vocabulary. Affixes that were previously used in Old and Middle English have been replaced in Modern English. Different suffixes are now used to indicate past tense, past participle, and irregular verb forms. Additionally, three types of blending techniques, namely reduplication, overlap, and clipping, are frequently used in contemporary

English discourse as common forms of expression.

### **\* Introduction**

Lexical change is a prominent example of language evolution, occurring continuously in dynamic societies. Linguists have long focused on this phenomenon. These changes affect a language's lexicon, or vocabulary. As time passes, language evolves; incorporating new words (neologisms), altering the spelling and meanings of existing words, and assimilating vocabulary from other languages. It reflects the fluidity of human expression by adjusting to new concepts and technologies. The study of linguistics and the purposes of language are closely related fields. Even if this work has little to do with language in contemporary culture, it is nonetheless important to comprehend the nature and substance of change. The English language has evolved historically across several stages, and linguistic shifts can be divided into internal and external categories. This classification is based on whether the changes are due to alterations in the language's social roles or to modifications made to the language itself. Previous research has mostly focused on lexical change in lexical and historical periods, with little

attention paid to lexical change in modern English and contemporary slang used in everyday life. This study aims to investigate the lexical alterations in modern informal English speech usage.

### **\* Literature Review**

Kriaučiūnienė and Sangailaitė (2016) examine new lexical items and the processes involved in creating new words to understand the strategies contributing to the expansion of the current English lexicon. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Online includes recently coined words since 2004, ensuring that the sample encompasses diverse semantic fields, and origins, and is already integrated into the working vocabulary. To fully explore the topic and achieve its goal, two tasks are completed: 1) defining the concept of new words and providing an overview of the processes of lexical expansion in the English language, and 2) analyzing the novel lexical items retrieved from the OED Online to determine which strategies are used and which are not in the creation of new words in modern English. The results imply that picking up new vocabulary in the English language is a difficult undertaking. Terms that are most commonly used interchangeably to refer to recent,

distinctive lexical items that are recognized and used by the language community are neologisms and new words. English's extensive toolkit for creating words is divided into several categories, including word formation, semantic change, borrowing, and others. These categories are further subdivided into numerous processes. When creating new vocabularies, the word-formation subtypes of derivation, compounding, and shortening are typically used most frequently.

In their 2017 study, Grieve et al. examine the evolution of words in American social media by using a multibillion-word corpus of Tweets that were gathered between October 2013 and November 2014. It presents a quantitative method for finding recently emerged words in large time-stamped natural language collections. 29 new word forms covering a range of semantic classes, grammatical parts of speech, and word formation processes were found as a result of this analysis. Through a multi-angle analysis of these 29 forms, the process of lexical emergence is clarified. Many of the emerging words found in this study seem to have their roots in the African-American community, which is an apparently influential subset of

the American population. Furthermore, using geo-coded corpora like the one used in this study, future research can examine the regional spread of emerging forms, which is an especially intriguing area.

Elisa (2019) investigates the emergence of novel combinations in the production of English word blends, as well as their uses, applications, and frequency. In particular, it performs a quantitative and qualitative analysis of 245 blends. The method is informed by the information at hand and is based on corpus data. The study makes use of lexicographic information from the online Oxford English Dictionary [OED2-3] as well as English corpora, such as the News on the Web corpus [NOW] and the Corpus of Contemporary American English [COCA]. The data shows the continued significance and growing use of the blending process as a mechanism for creating new English words. The data was gathered through advanced search in the OED between 1950 and 2010. The variety of the blending phenomenon makes it difficult to place into theoretical frameworks and morphological modules. Many blends display non-grammatical traits like unpredictable results, opaque analyzability into

preexisting morphemes, and difficult-to-identify source words. Because of the potential combinatory patterns of the source lexemes, the different parts that are kept in the final blend, and their semantic contribution to the overall meaning, the number of variables and classificatory criteria for blends increase. As a result, given an input, the output is less predictable. As this study has shown, analogies—especially those grounded in concrete schema models—can provide some regularity to the blending process and boost predictability when it comes to the creation of new blends. It is possible to interpret new blends such as Rogernomics, Obamamanomics, and Trumponomics using the existing series Nixonomics, Reaganomics, Clintonomics, etc. The resulting splinter term, (o)nomics, stands for "the economic policies of a President or head of state." Blends are easier to understand, speakers are encouraged to learn new blends, and regular splinters like -(o)nomics, -tainment, or -tarian make source words more recognisable.

Using English corpora, Davies (2015) investigates the various approaches to lexical change analysis in Late (and Early) Modern English. Although in this instance we have concentrated on lexical change, similar

methods can be used for other kinds of language change (syntactic, morphological, pragmatic, etc.). In the study of English language change, lexical change is frequently disregarded, particularly by researchers working with small corpora that lack sufficient tokens to analyse medium- and low-frequency words. Furthermore, since large, well-organized corpora for Late Modern English have been hard to come by until recently, we will concentrate on this period, from the early 1800s to the mid-1900s.

Prior research has focused on lexicon or historical period changes, with little attention given to linguistic changes related to present slang or informal language in daily life. To address this gap, the study analyzes linguistic changes in the use of modern English in everyday life using two large and diverse informal English language corpora, as well as online sources.

### **\* Contemporary English Every Day Usage**

Fifty years ago, it was just a theoretical prediction that English would become a global language. However, today's reality has proven that English is indeed universal. People worldwide consider learning

English essential for their personal, professional, and academic goals, leading to its widespread use as a first, second, or foreign language. Undoubtedly, in the modern era, English stands as a global language, meeting a recognized function across all countries on Earth. (Crystal, 1997). Receiving recognition from a country does not mean that its citizens should speak that language as their first language. It is possible to make a first, second, or foreign language become a global language. A global language is characterized by being the language that is most commonly used for communication in the vast majority of nations on Earth. People feel obligated to master it for the rest of their lives. (Rohmah, 2005:107)

When communicating with an academic or professional audience, formal language is commonly used. Academic essays, lab reports, cover letters, and resumes all utilize formal language to demonstrate the speaker's expertise, authority, and respect. Specifically, academics use formal language to present their findings and arguments in an objective and comprehensible manner. Typically used in casual conversations and on social media, English known as

informal language includes slang terms, contractions, and abbreviations.

The majority of casual language describes ideas with multiple simple words that could be expressed with a single, precise word (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018:99)

### **\* Lexical Changes in Modern English**

#### **\* Lexicology**

According to Ginzburg et al. (2004:7), lexicology is a branch of linguistics that specifically studies words. The term is derived from the Greek words *lexis*, meaning "word, phrase," and *logos*, meaning "learning, a department of knowledge." This combination results in the literal meaning of "the science of the word." However, lexicology goes beyond this definition by considering words from various perspectives and covering a broad range of topics within linguistics. As a result, lexicology has its own unique objectives and scientific investigation procedures. The primary goal of lexicology is to describe the vocabulary with its historical development and modern usage. It deals with words, variable word groups, phraseological units, and the morphemes that make up words. In lexicology, we study phraseological

units, words, variable word groups, morphemes, and other lexical units.

The word is the fundamental building block of language systems, which is the largest unit on the morphologic plane and the smallest unit on the syntactic plane of linguistic analysis. A word is a structural and semantic entity in the language system.

There is a distinction between two types of Lexicology: General and Special Lexicology. General Lexicology, a subfield of linguistics, concerns itself with the study of vocabulary that is independent of the specific characteristics of any given language. Special Lexicology, meanwhile, is focused on the study and description of a language's vocabulary, with words serving as the primary linguistic units. It must be emphasized that the foundations upon which every Special Lexicology rests are established by General Lexicology, which is a general theory of vocabulary. In the field of Special Lexicology, the diachronic approach examines the evolution and alteration of vocabulary over time. It is a distinct form of historical lexicology that explores the changes in vocabulary units within a language. Thus, the focus of English Historical Lexicology would encompass the origins of

English vocabulary units, their evolution, and the linguistic and extra-linguistic factors that have influenced their structure, meaning, and usage throughout the history of the English language (Ginzburg et al, 2004:8)

#### \* **Affixation**

Most words in the English language are derived from roots, which express the fundamental meaning of a phrase. Additional components, referred to as affixes, are appended to either the start or the end to further clarify these phrases. "Affixation" refers to this process of affixing. Prefixes are appended at the front end of a root, and suffixes are added at the back end. When it comes to creating new expressions, the foundation-laying process is crucial. (Umera-Okeke, 2007:9)

Affixation, according to Abeyweera (2020:180) is the process of creating a new phrase with an entirely new meaning or changing an already-existing lexicon. Morphemes are the smallest units of meaning in a language that are used to create new or unusual word forms. An affix is a morpheme that is added to the base, root, or essential part of a word to create a new term. In English, words are formed by fusing morphemes with root words. The intended implications

of phrases must be considered while recognizing and assessing them. Suffixes allow for in-depth analysis of the internal structure of complex words. Prefixes and suffixes can also be added to existing words or phrases to determine the etymology of new terms. Some derivational prefixes in English change the part of speech, such as a noun becoming a verb or a verb becoming an adjective, while others change the meaning of the word to which they are attached. It is also important to note that derivational suffixes change the part of speech and change the meaning of the added word. Derivational suffixes play a role in the formation of new words. (Abeyweera, 2020:180)

The root of a word is its most essential part. Words can be modified by adding prefixes at the beginning or suffixes at the end to change their meaning. Typically, prefixes and suffixes are added to the root of a word to modify its meaning. Prefixes come before word roots and modify their meaning. For example, "de-construct" is made up of the word root "construct" plus the prefix "de". When a prefix is added before a root, the meaning of the term changes. In addition, the suffix is added at the end of the word to further enhance its meaning. "Reasonable" is

an example of a word that has had its meaning enhanced by the addition of the suffix "able." (Abeyweera, 2020:181)

### \* **Blending**

Renner (2015:120) states that blending is a common technique across languages, present in all languages that recognize compounding and cutting as morphological operations. The exact nature of lexical mixing is still debated, with some morphologists categorizing a lexical item as a blend if at least one source word is clipped during the process. Blends are created by combining two existing words, typically by chopping off the stems of the original words. When two base words are used in blending, as opposed to one in derivation, there may be more base words involved. The hypothesis suggests that there are no explicit grammatical rules governing the mixing of word components.

Blending requires the choice of specific lexical items with a particular structure. To consider this unity, as cognitivists do, only from the perspective of thought would be wrong. Language is more than just a set of empty forms that can be imbued with meaning through mental processes like categorization, framing, blending, and mapping. It not only

reflects human experience but also shapes and transforms it. While meaning formation involves both language and thought, they converge in the process of blending. Blending goes beyond mere conceptualization and activation of lexical items. When constructing meaning, we can consider a word, pragmatic unit, or contextual meaning as a blend. To understand what is blended and how, we need to delve into the complexity of word meaning and its connection to contextual meaning (Kecskes, 2004:9).

#### \* **Borrowing**

One way to enrich language without losing its distinctiveness and specificity is through lexical borrowing. Languages still evolve according to their own rules, even when a large number of foreign words are incorporated into their lexicon, as was the case with the English language after the Norman Conquest. The fate of borrowed words can vary: some become deeply ingrained in the language of their recipient and continue to function as essential components of the native tongue, while others remain as words for specific purposes. The third category of loan words ceases to function as communication tools, eventually

become obsolete, and eventually vanishes entirely (Tarev, 2012:945).

Foreign words take time and complexity to become part of a recipient language's lexicon. Assimilation may not be complete for various reasons, and the borrowed word may retain certain unique characteristics from the donor language. However, these "residual" effects should not be seen as a mechanical rough "handling" of the word in the target language. Lexical units possessing "features of a foreign language" must be supported by a sufficient number of other words that share those features or by specific linguistic practices from the past or present (Ibid).

The source language and the host language are terms used to describe the languages into which borrowed words are conveyed. The word that serves as a model for the loanword is known as the "source language." Unlike phrases, loan words are often units that cannot be analyzed in the home language and are always words in a limited sense (i.e., lexical). Conversely, even if a term has complex or phrasal counterparts in the source language, its core structure is lost when translated into the target language. When multiple intricate



expressions from a different language are repeated in a similar way, the target language's morphological structure may shift. (Haspelmath, 2009:36).

**\* Method**

This study utilizes a variety of language sources, including common internet platforms such as Reddit and Urban Dictionary, as well as two extensive and diverse English language corpora. The Movie Corpus, being one of the largest English corpora available, provides a vast collection of 200 million words from 25,000 screen plays spanning from 1930 to 2018. Similarly, the TV Corpus contains 325 million words from 75,000 amateur films, comprising of comedies and dramas, produced between 1950 and 2018.

The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) is considered the most comprehensive collection of American English, and it incorporates links to several other English corpora, providing the largest and most equally dispersed collection of American English. This study employs both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to analyze the language data.

**\* Data Analysis and Discussion**

**\* Vocabulary and Taboo Words**

Over the past several decades, there has been a discernable and noteworthy evolution in the usage of vocabularies in both television programming (1950-2018) and film (1930-2018):-

	Most common 1930-1969 (movies)	More common 1990-2018 (movies)
ADJ	double-dealing, phoney, bashful, perplexed, astute, soapy, daffy, snappy, damned, apt, no-good, cockeyed, screwy, dishonourable, dreadful, savage, and terrifying	dull, pitiful, disgusting, enormous, nuclear, eerie, worldwide, imaginative, magical, intense, and ultimate, sh-tty, homeless, messy, business, pissed, damn, g---, huge,
NOUN	Newspaperman, waltz, mammy, sonny, mink, and nuisance Handkerchief, shilling, cinch, butler, skipper, chauffeur, plenty, tailor, chap, cigar, railroad, brandy, telegram, corporal, crook, hunch, regiment, squadron	sh-t, hell, girlfriend, relationship, d-ck, footage, tape, computer, bro, role, biking, chick, cancer, bullshit.
VERB	dim, fight, get to know, be delighted, amuse, encroach, dislike, slug, scam, furnish, sock, darn, consent, tangle, fuss, peddle, Accept, pardon, call, ruin, frighten, call, authorize, praise, and comply	suck, screw, p-ss, concentrate, obsessive, date, activate, surf, tape, engage, process, keep an eye on, manipulate, trigger, throw up, start, create

**Table 6.1: Changes of informal words (COCA)**

Another way the lexicon can evolve is through taboo words. Taboo words can be replaced with existing words, effectively giving the replacement word a new meaning—a kind of semantic shift.

In the past, it was frowned upon and considered inappropriate to use taboo words or swear words. The 1930 Motion Picture Production Code

banned the word "damn". However, an amendment was later approved to allow the use of "damn" and "hell" in appropriate historical context or literary quotations, following pressure from the producers of "Gone with the Wind". Over time, the use of profanity was mainly limited to theatrical productions. The first instance of the f-word being used in a movie was in 1970. It was only a matter of time before swear words began to appear more often in movies and everyday conversation.

Taboo Words	Movies from 1940 to 1970	Movies from 1990 to present
	Damn, F-words, hell,	f—king, shitty,shit, hell,f—k, a-s, bitch m-f-r, b-st-rd,p-ss, f-rt

Table 6.2 Taboo words

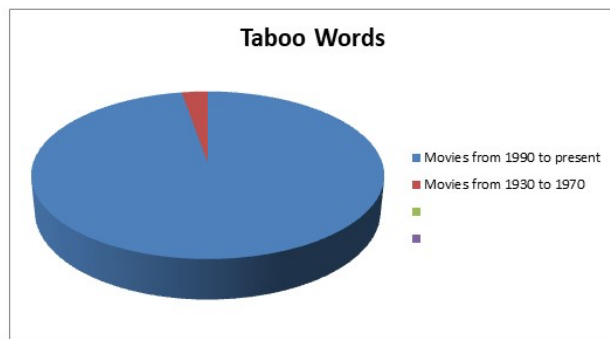


Figure 6.1 : Taboo words

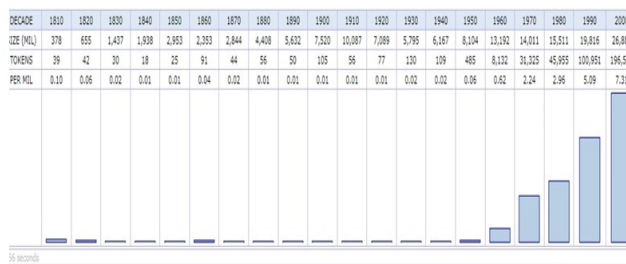


Figure 6.2 The use of taboo words in Old and Contemporary English (COCA)

\*Affixation

There are many affixes found in modern English informal everyday usage.

Affixation (suffixes)	Word
Y	Smarty – dirty – lucky- funny
ment	Enjoyment
ish	Childish- puckish
ous	Wondrous
ly	Marvelously- lively
less	Hopeless
ed	Knackered- gutted- wicked

Table 6.3 Affixes used in informal English

Informal English expressions are:-

apeckish tone of voice (Reddit)

gutt by fire (Reddit)

I am really knackered after work. (Reddit)

In the Modern English era, there are extinct affixes that were present in old and Middle English. One such prefix was y-, which was used to indicate the past tense of verbs. However, this prefix is no longer in use. Instead, the suffix -ed is used to indicate the past tense of modern English verbs, as well as the past participle and irregular verbs.

Some changes in suffixes are:-  
 inge/yng (suffix) waytyng - waiting  
 esse(suffix): bryghtnes, brightness – brightness  
 th (suffix): loveth – loves

In contemporary English, the suffix -s takes the place of Middle English's -th to indicate the third-person singular.

**\* Blending**

Blends in English are:-

**\* Portmanteaus**

A term is formed by combining two or more words, or word parts so that the combined word conveys a blend of the meanings of its parts. Lewis Carol was the first one to use this term in 1871.

Affluenza	(affluence + influenza)
alphanumeric	(alphabetic + numeric)
anklet	(ankle + bracelet)
biopic	(biography + picture)
athleisure	(athletic + leisure)
Botox	(botulism + toxin)
carjack	(car + hijack)
froyo	(frozen + yogurt)

**Table 6.4: Portmanteaus**

New types of blending in everyday modern English are:-

**\* Overlapping blends**

The most common type occurs when there are shared sounds between the end of the first word and the beginning of the second word. There may be one or more phonemes involved. Also, the beginning or end of a word may completely overlap with another word. The spelling of the word is a combination in this case. (Mirziae, 2014:20).

Backronymback + acronym

Smogsmoke + fog

Palimonypal + alimony

BeefaloBeef + Buffalo

Wargasm war + orgasm

**\* Clipping**

A word formed by breaking down a compound word into its parts while retaining the original meaning is called a clipped compound. Clipping is a particular form of word formation (Mattiello,2008).

Dink (Double Income with no kids).

*Dinks, with more disposable income, are the primary for luxury life:-*

Brill (Brilliant) back clipping.

You should watch this movie, it's brill!

Tude (attitude) for clipping.

Don't give me that tude, girl!

Reduplicatives are word pairs created by phonologically similar word repetition alternating specific vowels or consonants:

Itsy-bitsy

Do you sing "Itsy Bitsy" or "Incy

Wincy" spider?(Reddit)

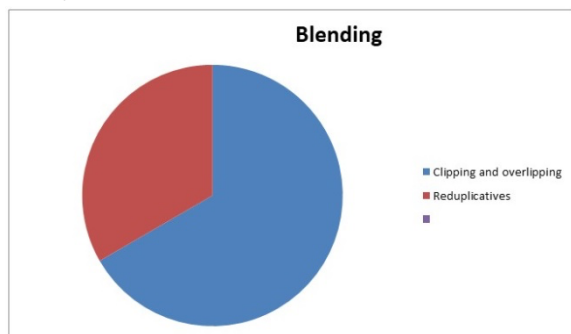
Clickety clackety

Clickety clackety, I roll to attackety. (Reddit)

In clackety, a new vowel "a" replaces the initial "i." This creates "clackety," the second component,

resulting in clickety-clackety as the reduplicative.

It is noteworthy that overlap, clipping and reduplicatives are prevalent types of contemporary English that are commonly used in daily conversations.



**Figure 6.3: Most common blending types**  
**\* Findings and Conclusion**

The study unequivocally demonstrates that modern English has undergone significant and impressive changes in recent decades. The usage of prohibited or profane language, which was once deemed improper, is now becoming increasingly prevalent in everyday speech and media, including movies. These findings conclusively establish the need for a reassessment of commonly held beliefs about the proper use of language.

Affixes used in Old and Middle English to indicate the past tense of a verb are obsolete in Modern English. The y- prefix, once used for this purpose, is no longer in use. Instead,

the -ed suffix is the standard marker for the past tense, past participle, and irregular verbs in modern English.

Three blending types—reduplication, overlap, and clipping—are commonly used as popular forms of expression in the contemporary English language.

Further research on the grammatical and linguistic changes in everyday colloquial language is recommended.

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