

Lexical Metamorphosis: Tracing the Evolution of the English Language through Oxford Dictionary's New Word Additions

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ABSTRACT

A language must evolve, in order to remain popular, relevant, and representative. The language needs to adapt to the time's evolving realities and requirements. Languages that fail to do so, soon fall into disuse and are forgotten as they are unable to convey the zeitgeist of the age. Thriving languages constantly expand, incorporate, and include many new and emerging concepts, ideas, phrases, and words. English can be credited as being a thriving language, as it has emerged as the generic language of the IT age and has expanded its reach, penetration, and scope even as other languages have withered. Using the Oxford English Dictionary, this paper makes an effort to analyze the most significant development of the English language through the addition of new words in Oxford English Dictionary 2020. With the help of this paper, we can track the path of linguistic expansion and give a direction to the English language, and also provide inputs to the evolution of the English language as a global lingua matter in the IT era. An analysis of the words added to the Oxford Dictionary in 2020 would present an interesting snapshot of the directions in which the language is moving in terms of linguistics, morphology, usage, and representation.

Keywords: Dictionary, English Language, Linguistics, Change, New words

Introduction

English is the world's most spoken and written language today. The popularity, universality, and endemic spread of English to all corners of the world can be attributed to its adaptability and ability to incorporate all the new, curious, vernacular, and even the archaic seamlessly. In an age where Information Technology and online engagement are changing the very fabric of communication, English has emerged as a unifying force. While other languages are struggling to survive, English has grown from strength to strength.

Social, political, and economic changes affect the development of every language and induce change and adaptation. Dictionaries are

reflections of time-induced changes and help to determine the direction in which a particular language is evolving and thus light the pathways to the future. For centuries past, dictionaries acted as guiding stars for the seekers of knowledge in a language and its linguistic experts, lexicographers, students, litterateurs, and teachers.

The Oxford English Dictionary is used to examine the evolution of the English language in this research. Specifically, it analyzes the most significant new words added to the dictionary in 2020, providing insights into the direction of linguistic expansion and the future evolution of English as a global language of communication. Through this analysis, the study illuminates the current state of the language, its evolving

morphology, usage, and representation, as well as its potential future direction over the next decade. The results of this study contribute to a well-informed discussion on the evolution of English as a global language in the context of the information age.

The Evolution of the English Language

Traditionally, English language development can be divided into three main phases. The Old English period was from 450-1100, The Middle English period prevailed from 1100-1500 and the modern English language that can be understood by a person today was from 1500 onwards. The language continues to evolve and grow, in the centuries since it was first brought to the British Isles by the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes in the Fifth Century (Baugh and Cable, 2002).

The evolution of the English language can be traced to the Proto-Germanic languages and only much later after English had become the main language of the British Isles did it gradually start developing independently (Algeo, 2009). The Celtic Languages were slowly displaced by English as it became the most widespread and oft-used language of the British Isles (Baugh and Cable, 2002) In the middle period, English was widely influenced by French from which it borrowed many words and phrases and made them their own (McCrum, Macneil and Cran, 1992). Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which is a classic of medieval English, contains about 40% French words (Algeo, 2009)

The Great Vowel shift, standardization, and many new words were the changes that demarcated the transition from medieval to Middle English to modern English (Baugh and Cable, 2002). This was also the period when the colonization of the globe went on at a rapid pace by English speakers. With the English speakers reaching the far

corners of the world, they took the language along with and spread it far and wide. English was further enriched with contact with other native languages and absorbed multiple influences. New words, native words, and new phrases were constantly added as the language continued to expand. As the British Empire rapidly expanded to become one where the sun never set, large swathes of the world adopted English and it became the lingua franca of the world (Ram, Tulsi; 1984). In India, the English Dictionary in the days of the British Empire found words such as *Kedgerree*, *bazaar*, *sepoy*, *sawaar*, etc.

An English colony fast emerging out of the shadow of Britain, and keen to carve a fresh identity was America (Kirkpatrick; 1978). The American Noah Webster, who was an educationalist and reformer exerted his energies in ensuring standardized American speech, along with the spellings, usage, and pronunciations. His *Spellers* became immensely popular and in each subsequent edition, they Americanized the spellings and pronunciation of common English words such as *defense*, *colors*, *center*, etc. The Dictionary has undergone many avatars in the last 70 years since the British Empire broke up and the commonwealth became so much more important. Standardization was now the need (Wells, 1973) and was answered with the introduction of detailed dictionaries. (Jackson, 2013)

Development of the Dictionary

The most widespread single-used language improvement device ever invented, as the dictionary has been called by Bolinger, 1985, is in reality, a reference book containing the words of a language, alphabetically arranged. The comprehensive and widespread usage of a dictionary stems from the fact that it also incorporates the usage, forms, functions, idiomatic

usage, spellings, and pronunciations of these words in a simple and easy-to-use format. (Quirk, 1974)

The concept of the dictionary is old and the earliest extant dictionary in any language is a Chinese dictionary from 300 BC. The earliest reference to the dictionary in English can be traced to the glossaries that also included French, Latin, or Italian words and phrases. The Dictionary as it is known now originated when John of Garland published his book which was titled 'Dictionarius' to help in Latin diction and the word was coined. The next development happened in 1604 when Robert Cawdray compiled the Table which contained 3000 English words arranged alphabetically (Hornby; 1974).

Dictionary and Lexicon

The Lexicon is a word that is often used interchangeably with a dictionary. However, it refers to the listing of the entire words in a language and is the 'total morphemic inventory of the language (Hartman, (1998).

The Dictionary is a detailed written document and possesses certain irrefutable linguistic characteristics. These make it possible to formulate typological classifications. Certain authors (Tekoriene⁴ and Maskaliuniene 2004) enumerate the following linguistic characteristics in the dictionary.

- The Objective and Purpose of the Dictionary
- The depth and variety of information offered concerning the headword of each entry.
- The degree and complexity of the content collected.
- The order or style of terms

Lexicographers or word experts who work on

dictionaries have vast databases which include books, newspapers, social media, and other written contexts and maintain up-to-date information on the words which are currently in circulation across the globe to be able to make the necessary additions and modulations to the words in the dictionaries (Pearsall, 1998).

The need for a dictionary

The basic purpose of the dictionary was to expound on a new word and contextualize it in its current usage. However, there were additional usages too, as the dictionary helped to ascertain the exact spelling of the word and also to determine its correct usage and pronunciation. Even when the user is not sure about the exact word he is seeking, or the spelling, he is enabled to find out the most appropriate word, if he sorts through the meanings that accompany each word. Sumner Ives eloquently summarises the purpose of a modern dictionary, "it should be a record of the modern language...what it is and how it reflects the present-day ideas and activities."

A major limitation of the dictionary in the age before digital media and instant word searches was that the dictionary did not stock all the possible words of the language. Some words, phrases, and idioms were considered beyond the scope of a dictionary. For instance, a Foreign Learners Dictionary does not include technical and scientific terms as these were considered beyond the usual needs of the normal user. This example brings to the fore a qualification of the dictionary that is quite relevant and often overlooked. This is the fact that a dictionary is about words and not about things.

Need for annual up-dating

The rapidly changing world today has necessitated constant updation and up gradation in order to stay relevant. The dictionary has also

had to adapt to the fast-changing landscape of the new world where slang, social media, and media-generated new words, and expressions are entering the lexicon of regular language with lightning speed (Quirk; 1974). The usage of certain words is changing, as are the connotations and meanings associated with words that have been used for a long but have suddenly a new and very different context.

The concept of the Dictionary - cycle is wherein old words are phased out as they have fallen into disuse and new words get incorporated. For example, words that are associated with horse-drawn carriages such as *barouche*, *buggy*, *buckboard*, and *cabriolet* are no longer in use. However, words associated with cars have become a part of the popular language and also found their way into the dictionary. This is just one small example that depicts language as a reflection of the socio-cultural and political milieu.

The very concept of a dictionary is that it's a constantly updated and expanding resource that reflects the churn of evolution that goes on in any language with time. Emerging and expanding disciplines, scientific and social change, IT and Internet-related jargon, media-generated words, etc are constantly getting incorporated and absorbed into our daily lives and language. Pop culture and slang make their way into mainstream language and require formal recognition. Changes in the sociocultural and scientific milieu are accompanied by the incorporation of words that become more important or the deletion of those that stop being contemporary or useful (Stein; 1985). Some words that are no longer included in the print edition of the Oxford English Dictionary but are present in the online version are *frutescent*, *sternforemost*, *hodad*, *snollygoster*, and *Vitamin G*.

Many words get outmoded or obsolete, but very few are deleted from the dictionary. As they are no longer in continuous usage, they remain in it but are classified differently to reflect their status change. The Oxford English Dictionary uses labels such as *obs.*, or *Now Hist.*, to highlight that the words are no longer in active usage. Other dictionaries use other labels such as 'obsolete', 'archaic', and 'old fashioned' but words are seldom deleted. Even if one word gets deleted in one dictionary, a search will reveal its presence in another one, so no word is lost (Pennington; 2019).

Dictionaries usually take a long-term view of the vocabulary and syntax, sentence formation, and usage of words as there are always people who would be seeking help from the dictionary as a resource to find words that were once common but are no longer so. Publics such as Historians, archivists, and novelists often attempt to use old words and they have only the dictionary to lend authenticity and credibility to these words.

Some New words added in 2019

The OED (Oxford English Dictionary) is a thorough dictionary of the English language that seeks to document the development and use of terms across time. The OED has been continually updated since its inception in 1884, and the 2020 edition is the most recent version. In this article, we will look at the terms that will be added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2020, as well as their historical background and impact. The growth of the English language and its integration into popular culture in our day are clearly shown by a quick glance at the new terms that were added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2019. The words added were *Gig Economy* (referring to all the freelance, work-from-home jobs which include 70 percent of all online teaching positions

now) Buzzy (anything that generates talk and becomes popular on word of mouth publicity) Purple(now refers to anything showy or too loud, other than the color).

The other words added include Goldilocks (planets that are just right, warm, and habitable) Receipts (if you have proof or evidence of anything) Unplug (detaching from digital life) On Brand (consistent with branding or identity) Go Cup (Any beverage that is carried out of the premises) Geosmin (smell of the earth after rain) Traumatology (injuries requiring immediate medical attention) headwind and tailwind (propulsion or constraints on projects) Bottle episode (any episode of a TV show shot in just one location)

Selection of new words added to Oxford Dictionaries Online

Relationships/Social Interaction:

- Date night: a planned event for a long-term spouse, particularly one with kids, to spend the night out together.
- Dunbar's number: a potential limit on the number of persons that one can have enduring, meaningful relationships with (usually considered to be roughly 150).
- Group hug: Hugging each other in a group is a common way for individuals to show support or unity.

Food/Beverage:

- Dirty martini: a drink often garnished with a green olive and prepared with gin (or vodka), dry vermouth, and a little bit of olive brine.
- Dog food: (new sense, chiefly computing): (of a company's staff) before it is made accessible to consumers, test it using a product or service created by that company.

- E-cigarette: another term for electronic cigarettes.
- Micro pig: a little, calm, hairless pig that is sometimes kept as a pet.
- Soul patch: a little patch of facial hair that protrudes from a man's bottom lip.

Technology:

- E-learning: technological learning that takes place online most often.
- Hackathon: a gathering of several individuals with the purpose of participating in collaborative computer programming that often lasts several days.
- NFC: Using near-field communication, which is a technology, mobile phones, and other gadgets may communicate wirelessly across short distances to do tasks like processing payments.
- UI: short for 'user interface'.
- User experience: a user's overall impression of a product, such as a website or a computer program, focusing on how simple or aesthetically pleasant it is to use (also UX, n.).
- Video chat: a face-to-face communication carried out via the Internet utilizing specialized software and cameras.
- 3D printing: a method of creating actual objects off of three-dimensional computer models, usually by adding several thin layers of material over time.

Miscellaneous:

- Douche: an obnoxious or contemptible person. Also douche, adj.
- Genius: very clever or ingenious.

- Guilty pleasure: anything that you like even if you think others don't normally value it highly, like a movie, TV show, or piece of music.
- Hat-tip: (in online contexts) used to express gratitude for someone who made a contribution of knowledge or served as the source of inspiration for a work of literature.
- Inbox: Message or email the recipient privately (someone, typically another member of a social networking site or Internet message board).
- Lifecasting: the practice of live-streaming a constant stream of video content that records one's daily activities on the Internet.
- LOLz: laughter, amusement, or fun; laughing out loud.
- Mansion tax: residential properties beyond a specific threshold are subject to a tax.
- Micro pig: a little, calm, hairless pig that is sometimes kept as a pet.
- Mwahaha: exclamation used to denote laughing, particularly hysterical or cackling laughter such as that emitted by a wicked figure in a cartoon or comic strip.
- Photobomb: By unexpectedly entering the camera's field of vision as the image is being shot, one might ruin a photo of (a person or object), usually as a joke or practical joke (n.: photobombing).
- Ripped: (new sense) being muscular; having well-marked or well-developed muscles.
- Takeaway: (new sense) An essential detail, notion, or reminder,

The 10th edition of the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary includes several words with

origins or meanings related to India, such as Chawl, Aadhaar, Hartal, Dabba, and Shaadi. These words reflect the influence of Indian culture and language on the English language, and their inclusion in the dictionary reflects their growing importance and usage in contemporary society. Overall, the OED's 2020 edition reflects the development of the English language and changing social and cultural landscape with a vast array of new words. These diverse words come from different cultures and subcultures, emphasizing their significance and legitimacy as additions to the English language. Their inclusion in the OED highlights their importance in capturing the spirit of our times.

Sources of new words

English expanded in horizon and scope as a result of being adopted as the language of the British Isles, their colonies, and the biggest and fast-emerging United States of America (Macarthur, 2006). By the 18th century, English became the most commonly spoken and understood language on the planet, and had to adapt accordingly, by incorporating new words from various sources, as described briefly below...

Social and cultural sources of the words were borne out by the exigencies of society and the changing dynamics thereof. As English traveled to new societies and cultures, it had to embrace new words and phrases, such as Salaam, Memsahib, Sahib, and Curry to name just a few from India. In all the societies and cultures where Englishmen traveled and lived, words were continually absorbed from the local vernacular languages into English. English has become a universal and transnational language in part because of cultural imperialism. English expanded in power and influence by the middle of the 20th century, when colonialism was swiftly supplanted by cultural imperialism, particularly

following the worldwide reach of US culture after World War II. Cases in point are Hollywood films that are seen across the globe and have replaced many local film industries. Non-English speaking people like Arab speakers also refer to their items of clothing as jeans, jackets, suits, ties, etc. Even countries such as China and Russia, which were very careful about safeguarding their languages have now accepted English speaking as a way of life (Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008).

Diplomatic and technological reasons were also behind the rapid spread of English. The US technological and economic hegemony has ensured the progression of English too. (McArthur, 2006, p. 369). The emergence of the United States as an industrial, commercial, and scientific powerhouse in the 20th century also led to the popularization of English. Since English was the language of diplomacy and well as communication between nations, it steadily grew in popularity till now it is incontestably the most popular language in the world. Hollywood and the profusion of the Internet and Social Media where English remains the language of choice and the youth all over the globe have taken to it in a big way. Today, English's growth depends on its usage in commerce, science, industry, diplomacy, and tourism.

What the new inclusions in the dictionary reflect

As the dictionary is widely considered the foundation, as well as the repository of any language, it provides a candid picture of the current realities of that language. The Dictionary is not neutral, but a collective and socially vital function and the words in it reflect the values, modes, and ways of life in that particular time and space. New cultural meanings and contexts keep lending new meanings and inflections to words and concepts such as fairness, inclusion,

gender neutrality, feminism, LGBT community evolution, etc are all developments that are continuously impacting life and language. To quote an example, some dictionaries have synonyms for 'woman' that include 'bitch', 'baggage', 'mare', 'wench', 'petticoat', and 'biddy'. These are unacceptable in today's social milieu. Many other words which are inclusive, respectful, and more attuned to today's realities are constantly being coined which will eventually displace these derogatory terms.

The development of science and technology continues to have a significant impact on the English language. Social Media is becoming an increasingly greater influence and developing fields such as 3D Printing, NFC (Near Field Communications) and e-learning are generating new words and phrases every day that need to be validated and incorporated into the corpus of the language. Language evolution is being shaped by terms that have become the everyday lexicon of internet users, such as tweeps, video chats, lifecasting, and hat tips. These have all found a home in the Oxford Dictionary now as have acronyms in regular online use such as lolz to UI and UX. Quarterly updates to the language's database are made possible by the rich, diversified, and complex range of words and phrases that come from all kinds of societal sources and modes, including popular culture, science, technology, politics, social media, and IT, among others.

Conclusion

The following inferences may be made based on the perusal of the new words which have found a place in the OED in the year 2020. The phonetic information is very exhaustive in the OED and augurs well for the future as language encounters more and more challenges from slang and Internet abbreviations etc. There is a marked

increase in the detailing of the words as more and more words from other languages and cultures enter the OED. The OED is relying on much more extensive databases to make etymological information, cultural references, thesaurus, usage notes, and additional examples and sample sentences than ever before. As the English language encounters many linguistic challenges with a rapid spread in the age of IT, where different and shorter spellings and usage other than the original are becoming more and more common, the OED is racing to keep pace with the change and contextualize the rapid evolution of the linguistic and phonetic part of the language.

The Scope and scale of the Dictionary are continuously stretching and expanding as it encompasses more and more information. The different variants of usage and spelling are also noteworthy. In constant reinvention since its inception, the dictionary remains the foremost tool of language and culture absorption and broadcasting as the custodian of the language. Nowadays equipped with digital tools, online resources, extensive databases, and AV tools, the dictionary is also able to maintain and even increase its relevance even in the age of the internet and IT only through constant reinvention and engagement with the speakers, writers, and readers that form its audience and user base. The recent and very rapid changes in the dictionary are an accurate reflection of the sweeping and profound changes that society and humanity as a whole are facing. Information and Communication Technology has revolutionized the way we handle and process information and has almost reshaped the English language. English now sounds closer to informal oral discourse rather than the formalized language it used to be in the last century, or even a half-century ago. This rate and pace of change are expected to

continue by linguistics as IT becomes more entrenched in our daily personal and professional lives.

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