

EARLY NEW ENGLISH VOCABULARY

Safarova Iroda Kamoljon qizi

Termiz davlat pedagogika Instituti

irodasafarovaaa2000@gmail.com

Ilmiy rahbar: Xudoyberdiyeva Oyjamol

Teacheroyjamol@gmail.com

Abstract

The Early New English period (1500–1700) represents a crucial stage in the development of the English language, marked by a rapid expansion of its vocabulary. During this time, English absorbed a large number of words from Latin and Greek due to the influence of the Renaissance, as well as from modern European languages such as French, Italian, Spanish, and Dutch through trade and cultural exchange. At the same time, new words were created by native processes such as affixation, compounding, and semantic change. The invention of the printing press and the rise of literature, especially the works of William Shakespeare and the King James Bible, also contributed to the enrichment and standardization of the language. As a result, by the end of the 17th century, English had evolved into a more expressive and flexible language, ready to meet the cultural and intellectual needs of the modern world.

Key words: Early New English, vocabulary development, Renaissance, borrowing, word formation, standardization.

Introduction

The period known as Early New English (approximately 1500–1700) marks one of the most dynamic and influential stages in the development of the English language. During these two centuries, English underwent major changes in pronunciation, grammar, and especially in vocabulary.

This era coincided with the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Age of Exploration, all of which expanded people's knowledge of the world and introduced countless new ideas and terms. As a result, the English lexicon grew rapidly, setting the foundation for the language we use today.

Discussion

Several important social and cultural movements deeply affected English vocabulary in this period. The Renaissance inspired renewed interest in ancient Greek and Latin literature, science, and philosophy. Scholars began to borrow classical terms to express new academic and artistic ideas.[1] The Reformation brought religious and political transformations. Translating the Bible into English, especially the King James

Version (1611), helped to standardize vocabulary and spread English to wider groups of society.[2]

The Age of Exploration and early colonial expansion introduced English speakers to new lands, plants, animals, and cultures. This contact brought many foreign words into English, enriching the language with global influences. The invention of the printing press by William Caxton in 1476 also played a key role, helping to unify spelling and promote a common written standard based on the London dialect.[3]

Classical Borrowings. The revival of classical learning led to a massive influx of Latin and Greek words, especially in the fields of science, philosophy, art, and education.

Examples include radius, hypothesis, element, literature, system, method, theory, and library. These borrowings gave English a more intellectual and international character.

Borrowings from Modern European Languages: Cultural and trade relations with continental Europe brought in many new words: French: figure, courage, ballet, police, fashion, machine. Italian: opera, piano, balcony, fresco, sonnet, volcano. Spanish and Portuguese: tomato, tobacco, banana, cocoa, cargo, hurricane. Dutch: skipper, yacht, cookie, dock, landscape. These words reflect the growing international influence of England during this period:

Native Word Formation. English also expanded by creating new words from its own resources through affixation, compounding, and semantic change. Examples include: affixation: happiness, government, rebuild, friendship

compounding: schoolboy, blackbird, breakfast semantic change: journey (originally “a day’s travel”) came to mean any trip; meat narrowed from “food in general” to “animal flesh.” Early New English literature had a lasting impact on vocabulary development.

Writers such as William Shakespeare enriched the language with hundreds of new words and expressions, many of which are still in use.[4] Words like majestic, lonely, critical, generous, gloomy, and assassination are believed to have been first recorded or popularized by him. The translators of the King James Bible also helped to spread a consistent and poetic form of English, introducing many idioms still recognized today.

The spread of printing and education encouraged more uniform spelling and usage. London English gradually became the basis of the emerging standard, although complete standardization would not be achieved until the 18th century. Nevertheless, the Early New English period laid the foundation for this process, stabilizing many forms that continue into Modern English.[5]

Conclusion

The Early New English period was a turning point in the growth of English vocabulary. The combination of classical borrowings, European influences, native creativity, and global exploration transformed English into a rich, expressive, and flexible language.

By the end of the 17th century, English had developed most of the core vocabulary and linguistic features that define the language today. It was ready to become not only the language of England, but a language of science, literature, and international communication.

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