

Boboxonova Dildora O'ktam qizi

Termiz davlat pedagogika Instituti

dildoraboboxonova096@gmail.com

Ilmiy rahbar: Xudoyberdiyeva Oyjamol

Teacheroyjamol@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The Early New English period (approximately 1500–1700) was marked by significant expansion and enrichment of the English vocabulary. During this era, English absorbed a large number of borrowings from Latin, Greek, French, Italian, Spanish, and Dutch, reflecting the influence of the Renaissance, trade, exploration, and cultural exchange. At the same time, native word-formation processes such as compounding, prefixation, suffixation, and conversion contributed to the creation of new terms. Semantic changes in existing words further enhanced the expressive power of the language. The printing press and literary figures like Shakespeare played a crucial role in standardizing and popularizing new vocabulary. Overall, the vocabulary of Early New English laid the foundation for the modern English lexicon, making it richer, more flexible, and capable of expressing complex ideas in literature, science, and everyday life.

Key words: *Early New English, vocabulary, borrowing, word formation, semantic change, Renaissance, printing press, standardization.*

Introduction

The period of Early New English (1500–1700) was crucial for the development of the English lexicon. During this era, the language expanded both quantitatively and qualitatively. The Renaissance, Reformation, exploration, and trade introduced new concepts, ideas, and objects that required new words. Borrowings from Latin, Greek, French, Italian, Spanish, and Dutch enriched the language, while native processes such as compounding and affixation created new English words. The printing press and rising literacy facilitated the dissemination and standardization of vocabulary across England, shaping the language into a more uniform and expressive system.

Discussion

The vocabulary of English expanded greatly during the early modern period. Writers were well aware of this and argued about it. Some were in favour of loanwords to express new concepts, especially from Latin. Others advocated the use of existing

English words, or new compounds of them, for this purpose. Others advocated the revival of obsolete words and the adoption of regional dialect.

The Early New English vocabulary underwent major changes due to several interconnected factors:

Borrowings

Latin and Greek: Scholars and writers introduced scientific, philosophical, and literary terms such as education, philosophy, atmosphere, and democracy.

French: Words related to art, government, and lifestyle, like bureau, fashion, and courage, entered English.

Italian, Spanish, Dutch: Maritime trade, exploration, and cultural contact introduced opera, volcano, guitar, tobacco, chocolate, yacht into the lexicon.

Native Word Formation

English continued to generate words internally using:

Compounding: bookcase, highway, moonlight

Prefixation and Suffixation: friendship, desirable, reread, unkind.

Conversion: nouns into verbs or adjectives (bottle → to bottle, email → to email [later periods]).

Semantic Change

Many older English words changed meaning:

silly → “foolish” (from “happy”)

meat → “flesh of animals” (from “food”)

knight → “nobleman” (from “servant”)

Influence of Printing and Literature

The printing press accelerated the spread of new words, while writers like Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton popularized and experimented with vocabulary. Shakespeare alone introduced hundreds of words such as assassination, lonely, majestic, and gloomy, leaving a lasting impact on the lexicon.

Social and Cultural Factors

The Renaissance and Reformation, along with England's overseas trade and exploration, created a need for new terms to describe religion, politics, science, and foreign objects (salvation, preacher, potato, tomato, cargo). This global exposure expanded English vocabulary far beyond its previous limits.

Literary Influence

Writers like William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, and John Milton contributed significantly to vocabulary expansion. Shakespeare alone introduced hundreds of new words and expressions into the language.

The Renaissance, Reformation, overseas exploration, and trade all created a need for new words to describe new ideas, religious concepts, foods, and technologies. This period made English more expressive, flexible, and suitable for literature, science, and everyday communication.

Conclusion

The Early New English period was a critical stage in the development of the English lexicon. The vocabulary expanded significantly through borrowings from Latin, Greek, French, Italian, Spanish, and Dutch, while native word-formation processes such as compounding, prefixation, and suffixation produced many new English terms. Early New English vocabulary laid the foundation for Modern English, creating a language that is flexible, expressive, and capable of adapting to new ideas and influences. The period demonstrates how historical, cultural, and social forces can directly shape the growth and development of a language.

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