

THE WORD FORMATION METHODS

- English language is noted for its rich and varied vocabulary.
- This is because of the synthesis of various words by different methods.
- The most important fact about English language is its acceptability and easily adapting nature; which is evident in the array of loan words.
- There are many loan words in English language; from Indian, Chinese, Germanic and French languages.
- The various ways of word formation methods are used from time immemorial.

1. ONOMATOPOEIA/ IMITATION

- It is the formation of a word from a sound, which closely resembles the object/ thing.
- This is the traditional method of word formation.
- The term ‘onomatopoeia’ comes from Greek language, which means making or creating names.
- Words, having imitative or echoic characters are formed out of this method.

Eg:

James Joyce in his work “Ulysses” (1922) coined the onomatopoeic *tattarrattat* for a knock on the door.

TV series “Batman” contributes onomatopoeic words such as *wham!*, *pow!*, *biff!*, *crunch!* and *zounds!*

Some combinations of onomatopoeic sounds indicate certain meanings:

For example: sound combination ‘**sn**’ at the initial position of a word indicates something related to nose— **sniff**, **snuff**, **sneeze**, **snore** etc.

Sound combination ‘**bl**’ at the initial position of a word indicates something related to inflation— **blow**, **blast**, **bladder** etc.

Sound combination ‘**st**’ at the initial position of a word indicates something related to lack of movement or stable situation—**stop**, **stay**, **still**, **stagnant** etc.

Sound combination 'gl' at the beginning of an English word can denote something that is shining or iridescent— **glitter**, **glisten**, **gleam** etc.

BUT, this is not correct in every case. This sound combination can make different meanings as well.

2. CONVERSION

It is the change of a word from one grammatical category to another, indicating different meanings in each category. For example

noun-to-verb

*He is a **pilot** (Noun)*

I have **piloted** all my techniques to switch on the machine (**Verb**) [means “try out”]

verb-to-noun

She is going **to cook** the food (**Verb**)

He is a **cook** (Noun)

The doctor eyed (**Verb**) my swollen eye (**noun**) — the sentence has both the forms of the word ‘eye’

adjective-to-noun

He is a **professional** artist (**Adjective**)

She is a **professional** (Noun)

adjective-to-verb

The **green** grass looks lovely (Adjective)

It is better **to green** the campus (Verb) – means ‘to make eco- friendly’.

3. ABBREVIATION/ SHORTENING/ CLIPPED FORMS

It is the omission of sounds from various parts of a word, and thereby creating a short form of the word. It can be of two types: if the initial part of the word gets omitted, then the process of shortening is known as APHESIS and if the end part is omitted, the process of shortening is known as APOCOPE.

Aphesis: Aphesis is the gradual loss of a short unstressed vowel at the beginning of a word.

Eg: **way** from **away**
 void from **Avoid**

Apocope: Apocope is the loss of one or more sounds or letters at the end of a word.

Eg: **zoo** from **zoological park**
 Maths from **mathematics**

Some shortened words are popular to all since, the original words have been forgotten.

Eg: words like **root** and **sweet** come from old English terms like **roote** and **sweete**. Similarly, the term **wig** comes from the term **periwig**. But now, nobody remembers the earlier terms.

4. SYNCOPATION

It is the process where a vowel is omitted from a word, and the consonants that were presented at both sides of the omitted vowel are pronounced together. As time goes, the spelling gets certain changes, without any change in pronunciation.

For eg: the word **else** comes from **elles**.

- At first, the vowel **e** gets omitted from the word. (**elles** > **ells**)
- Then, the consonants at both the sides of the omitted vowel (**l** and **s**) are pronounced together.
- Later, the spelling has reformed as **else**, but pronunciation remains the same.

Eg: **hence** comes from **henes**

- At first, the vowel **e** gets omitted from **henes** (hens).
- Then, the consonants at both sides of the omitted vowel (**n** and **s**) are pronounced together

- Later, the spelling has reformed as **hence**, but pronunciation remains the same.

5. PORTMANTEAU WORDS/ BLENDS

The term is coined by Lewis Carroll in his work: *Through the Looking Glass* of 1872. Here, part of a word is combined with part of another word (or with the second word itself) to form a new word. This newly formed word contains both the ideas behind the original terms.

Eg: Oxford + Cambridge = Oxbridge

medical + care = Medicare

web + log = blog

iPod + broadcasting = podcasting

spoon + fork = spork etc.

6. METANALYSIS/ REANALYSIS

It is closely related to syncopation. The consonant at the beginning/ end of one word gets attached to the vowel at the nearby word, thus a new combination is made without any change in meaning.

Eg:

- **ick name** in old English means **another name**. It was usually articulated with the article **an**. That is, *Tommy is an ick name of Paul*.

- Later, the **n** in the article **an** gets attached to the **i** sound of the word **ick**, thus forms the word **nick**. Now 'nick name' is used as a word compound. That is *Tommy is a nick name of Paul*.

Similarly words like **an umpire** from **a numpire**,

an apron from old English: **a napron** (cloth) and

an auger (means, a tool for making holes) from old English **a nauger** (means, a swearing word) follows the same pattern.

7. TELESCOPING

This is also similar to Portmanteau Words. Here two words are combined into one without any change in meaning. Many have considered portmanteau words as telescopic words, nowadays.

Eg: **Overall** from **over** + **all**

Pinafore (means, a sleeveless dress for girls) from **pin** + **afore**

8. COMPOUNDING/ COMPOSITION

Two or more category of words are combined together to form a new word, and the meaning of the newly formed word may or may not differ from the two words combined. No sound is lost in this process.

Eg: Words like **Blackbird**, **weekday**, **Goldfish** etc., are quite clearly just a combination of two words.

Words can be combined in whatever manner we like, for example, compounding of **noun and noun**, **verb and noun** (washing machine), **adverb and verb** (output), **adjective and noun** (software) etc.

9. ACRONYMS/ WORDS FROM INITIALS.

In some cases, initial letters are used more commonly than the original full forms of words. As a result, the initials are regarded as words in themselves. Thus we speak of a B.A or M.A rather than Bachelor of Arts or Masters of Art, or M.P or C.I.D, many English speakers may not even know the full forms. Sometimes, the separate initials letters are combined to form words, by dropping the full-stop marks as in UNESCO, NATO, RADAR, and LASER.

- RADAR: Radio Delecting an And Ranging
- LASER: Light Amplification by the Stimulated Emission of Radiation.
- NATO: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- A.M. – ante meridiem [in the morning]
- B. C. E – Before Common Era.
- HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus
- VIP: Very Important Person etc.

10. AFFIXATION

This is a very ancient method of word formation, to be found in almost every language. Here, a simple root word is taken and a suffix/ prefix are added to it.

Eg:

Suffixes

-dom as in kingdom, freedom.

-ship as in workshop, fellowship.

-less as in careless, moneyless.

-y as in healthy, sticky.

-ish as in foolish, clownish.

-ee as in employee, addressee.

-en as in lengthen, shorten

Prefixes

Ambi- as in ambivalent, ambidextrous.

Pre- as in premature, pre-Raphaelite.

Post- as in postgraduate.

Sub- as in submarine, subzero.

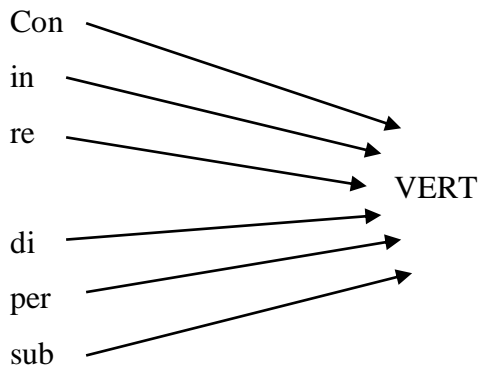
Inter- as in international, interracial.

Extra – as in extraordinary, extracurricular.

Super- as in supersonic, superfast.

- Surprisingly, a single root word can mean different things when different prefixes are added to it.

That is from the simple Latin root **vert** meaning to turn, we get.



11. WORDS FROM PROPER NOUNS

A good number of words entered English language, which are derived from Personal Names. The word **utopian** comes from Thomas Moore's *Utopia* and the word **Lilliputian** comes from Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Many garments have taken their names of those who first used them or introduced to the public. The word **teddy bear** comes from the American president Theodore Roosevelt. The word **lynch** comes from Judge Lynch of the United States who dispensed justice in a somewhat summary manner. A number of words were derived from place names, to denote products which originally came from that place. Example: **Calico** from **Calicut**, **Muslin** from **Mosul**, **Millinery** from **Milan**.

12. BACK FORMATION

This is another means by which new words have come into being. Most back formations are the result of a misunderstanding.

- For example in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was an adverb **groveling** meaning in a pathetic manner or on the ground. Thus one would say **he lay groveling in the dust** where groveling is an **adverb of manner**. In course of time, the termination – **ing** was mistaken to be a present continuous. In the next step, the infinitive **to grovel** was formed. Through a totally mistaken idea, a new verb was added to the English language.
- In the same way the verb **to sidle** is a back formation from the adverb **sidling**, and the nouns **beggar**, **hawker**, **editor** by back formation gave rise to verbs **to beg**, **to hawk**, **to edit**. Most nouns are formed from the verb adding **–er** or **–or** (**worker**, **singer**, **gambler** etc.) but here the process has worked in the opposite direction.
- **Sulk** from **sulky**, **Proliferate** from **Proliferation** are other examples.

13. CORRUPTION/ MISUNDERSTANDING

Sometimes new words are formed by corruption or through misunderstanding. For example, the word **whitsun** (the 7th day after Easter) came into existence through a corruption. It refers to the Sunday following Easter. It refers to the festival, which celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit. The word whitsun gives rise to **Whit Sunday** which meant **white Sunday**. On that day, all converts to Christianity wore white robes, as a symbol of purification. Whit Sunday was transformed to **whitsun day**. Later on, the analogy of this came **whitsun week**, **whitsun tide**, **whitsun Sunday**, and even **whitsun Monday**, which is a contradiction in terms!

14. FREAK FORMATION

Certain words came into existence as a result of Freak- Formation that is quite unexpectedly or strangely or accidentally. For example: **Teetotaller**, now used as a noun to indicate one who abstains (rejects) from alcohol.

- The word originated as a result of stammering by an anti- alcohol advocate. He stammered while pronouncing the expression **total abstainer** and thus the word was formed.
- The word **tandem** is another example for freak formation. The Latin word means ‘**at length**’. Once, when two horses were placed in front of the other to draw a vehicle, some humorist named the combination **a tandem**, as the beasts were ‘at length’; and when later the double bicycle appeared this also was called **a tandem**.
- **Funny bone** is the name given to the long bone in the upper arm and is located between the elbow joint and the shoulder. This bone is named as **humerus**, in medical terms. Some scholar once found the similarity of the terms humorous/ funny and humerus. Thus he has named the bone as funny bone.

15. REDUPLICATION

Reduplication is a word formation process in which meaning is expressed by repeating all or part of a word.

Eg: **okey- dokey**

Flim- flam

Pitter- patter etc.

English language has a number of such coinages. Many are word used to lisp/ baby words: **tum-tum, pee- pee, boo- boo** etc. some are recently made words that include in a slang: **Bling- bling, hip- hop, cray- cray, abracadabra, bees- knees, boogie- woogie, boy- toy, chick- flick** etc. rhyming is considered when it comes to reduplication. The second word should rhyme with the first one or the same word gets repeated.