

LING 203 Seminar Week 4 Word classes

I. Summarise Ch.3 from B&B (2001)

II. Questions directly related to the lecture

1. Specify the word class/syntactic category/part of speech of all the words in the following text (for now ignore the underlining and italics):

Since taking *the world by storm in the nineties* with his six pack and his chart smash *Mysterious Girl* Peter Andre has opted *for the quiet life*, he now enjoys a *laidback existence in Cyprus*.

No longer in his *pop* prime Peter still keeps himself in *good* shape, 'I'm working on having my six pack *back* but I've got about a four and a half pack *at the moment*.'

(celebrity.granadainteractive.com)

2. Whereas question (1) was about word classes (lexical categories), now you're going to analyse phrasal categories, i.e. types of phrases. For each of the 8 *italicised* constituents specify what kind of phrase they are (i.e. NP, VP, AP, AdvP, PP).

3. What is the difference between complements and modifiers? For the 8 *underlined* constituents of the little text above specify whether they are complements or modifiers, and for each explain why.

III. Linguistic analysis

Consider the following two passages from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:

Hamlet: Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of our players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines. (III.ii)

Claudius: Where is Polonius?

Hamlet: In heaven. Send thither to see. If your messenger find him not there, seek him i'the other places yourself. But if indeed you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby. (IV, ii)

1. For all the words, specify their word class.

2. One of the aspects Shakespeare's languages is most famous for is his use of the morphological process of CONVERSION, also known as ZERO-DERIVATION or

FUNCTIONAL SHIFT. Conversion is the process whereby a word that originally belongs to one word class (say, a noun or an adjective) gets pressed into service as a member of another word class (for instance, as a verb) *without* changing the structure of the word. The latter condition is very important, as it makes conversion different from ordinary derivation, e.g. *beauty* (Noun) > *beauti-fy* (Verb). There are two examples of conversion in the fragments from Hamlet. What do you think they are?

3. It's often said that conversion is an especially common process in English, as compared to many other languages. Can you think why? You may want to see what scholars have said about this, e.g. Jean Aitchison (1989) *Words in mind: An introduction to the mental lexicon*, p.160.

4. Given that conversion is so widespread in English, can you think of any recent examples?

IV. Mini-investigation

In Present-day English verbs (e.g. *walk*) are inflected for past tense (*walk-ed*), for present tense if the subject is 3rd person singular (*walk-s*). In addition they may take the *-ing* ending (in the progressive: *walk-ing*), and the *-ed* ending doubles up to show that a verb is the past participle (*He has/had walk-ed*). Finally, the infinitive may be marked by *to* (*He wants to walk*). While the inflections of most verbs are like *walk* there are various kinds of exceptions (*sing-sang-sung*, *cut-cut-cut*, *is-was-been* etc.) Compared to this relatively simple system, Old English was a lot more complicated.

1. How did OE verbs inflect? Was this the same for all verbs? In order to answer this question you may use e.g.:

Blake, Norman F. 1996. *A history of the English language*. London: Macmillan. Chapter 4 on Old English.

Freeborn, Dennis. 1992. *From Old English to standard English*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Hogg, Richard. 2002. *An introduction to Old English*. Edinburgh: EUP. Chapters 2-6.

Smith, Jeremy. 1999. *Essentials of early English*. London: Routledge.

You can also find quite a lot of information about Old English grammar on the web, but be aware that it's not always very complete, or even fully correct.

2. Now consider the phenomenon of conversion/zero-derivation/functionl shift (see question III, above). Do you think this was very common in Old English? Explain your answer. (Hint: the reference to Jean Aitchison in question III.3 may come in handy here as well.)