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Word Study

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Melissa Mohon
Honors Project
Spring 1975

"WORD STUDY"

My primary objective in undertaking this Honors project in word study was to increase my command and capabilities in utilizing words. Understandably, as one progresses in his education and life, the need for words—more precise meanings, more vivid and appropriate words—are needed. It is an opened-ended endeavor.

In order to accomplish this objective, I undertook as my requirement for each week to study and fully comprehend the definitions of one hundred words. This was efficiently accomplished through the book, "Word Mastery Made Simple" by Arthur Waldhorn, Ph.D. and Arthur Zeiger, Ph.D. Each chapter has a core list of fifty words, plus supplementary information about the English language (i.e. prefixes, suffixes, synonyms, etc.). Included in each chapter are Word Mastery Tests that help the student to understand the words and their uses more fully. Two chapters were required per week along with a conference with my advisor, Dr. Raouf Halaby, Ed.D. The conference time each week was used as a time to discuss the words and their meanings, and clear up anything that might be confusing.

A total of one thousand words were learned during the Spring semester of 1975. These words have gradually been incorporated into my "everyday" speech, as well as my formal writing. In order to keep these words a part of my working

vocabulary, I have written each one and its meaning in a notebook, which can be used of periodic review. The meanings were intentionally made simple so as to further boost memory of them. The phonetic respelling of those words which were difficult to pronounce was included also. Many times I recognize a word, but cannot recall its meaning, so I simply look it up in my notebook. This is easy, plus the likelihood of my looking the word up increases because I know-I should know it.

There were several things of major interest that I learned:

1.) Roots, prefixes, suffixes

There was an extensive listing of the most common Latin, Greek and Anglo-Saxon roots, prefixes and suffixes. Their use was illustrated.

introspective	to see inside
prefix root suffix intro- spec- -ive inside to see description	
incorrigible	not capable of being corrected
prefix root suffix incor- rig- -ible not correct capable	
constituent	one who stands with or for
prefix root suffix consti- tit- -ent with stand one who does	

2.) Synonyms and antonyms

In the study of synonyms, distinctions among the words must be emphasized. For example, enemy-opponent-foe-antagonist, are all synonyms, but their implications

are different. In using synonyms, caution must be used in order to make sure the meaning you wish to convey is truly represented by the word. Used capriciously, they become irritating and distracting stylisms.

The study of antonyms can serve as the foundation of vocabulary study. Before an antonym can be paired with a word, the words, themselves, must be analyzed with scientific rigor.

3.) Descending, ascending, widening, narrowing words

Words are dynamic structures, just as our world is. They descend, ascend, widen and narrow to meet the needs of their users. For example, hussy at one time meant housewife. It now has a more negative connotation. Girl has narrowed, earlier it could have designated a young person of either sex. A word that widened in scope was unkempt which referred to the hair of the individual, whereas now it refers to his general appearance. Meat which initially referred to any kind of food, now refers to 'edible flesh'.

4.) Words may become abstract, concrete, lose or gain force.

Another important shift in meaning occurs when a word loses force as terrific, great, good have. These words are used to such an extent in our language until they attract little if any attention. Some words have intensified. For example, foul and filth in earlier

English were similarly used as dirt is today. Their meanings have strengthened to mean something 'very offensive to the senses'.

Most words in English began as names for persons, places, or things. As civilization advanced, names for ideas and qualities became necessary. 'Coward' developed from Latin cauda meaning tail, which evoked the image of a dog with his tail between his legs.

- 5.) Modern English is a potpourri of contributions from many languages. Many words have retained their original form, while others have become completely Anglicized.

terrace - Latin

balcony - Italian

paper - Egyptian

divan - Persia

These French expressions have retained their original form-*raison d'être*, *bête noire*-as these German words have-*Zeitgeist*, *Weltschmerz*.

As stated in the beginning, this is an open-ended endeavor which will continue as long as I have use of my mind. Because words are such an important part of our lives-in expressing our thoughts, ideas, emotions, desires-the study can never end. Vocabulary study is very exciting, besides being useful. Although this study ends, I will continue to seek a larger and more precise vocabulary.