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Synopsis on theme

«THE SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE»

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INTRODUCTION

Students often complain that Shakespearean language is too difficult to understand. They wonder why he could not have written in "normal" English. Actually he could. Shakespeare was writing in everyday language of his age that is in the English spoken in the XVI-XVII centuries. Although Shakespeare was responsible for the appearance of numerous neologisms, he did not make up a language of his own. More that that, if William Shakespeare were alive today, he would have a great difficulty in understanding the way the modern English is written and spoken.

Shakespeare contributed to the transformation of the English language. He was creating his plays and sonnets at a time when Latin was still the language of documents. The English of Elizabethan era or the early modern English as linguists call it was only about 100 years old. There existed no published dictionaries yet. There were no established grammar rules, and it was not studied in schools systematically. In fact in schools children studied mostly Latin and Greek, but not English. The syntax rules of the English language were unsteady and the vocabulary was limited. The future of the early modern English was precarious.

The modern English language owes much to William Shakespeare. He invented almost 2000 of common words. He freely changed nouns into verbs, verbs into adjectives, connected words together, inventing combinations that had never been used before. He added affixes, and devised brand new original words.

Shakespeare influenced greatly the entire language system. Prior to his time, the grammatical and lexical rules of English were unstable. They had no standardized variant. [2] Shakespeare's plays contributed to the process of standardization of the English language. Numerous words and expressions coined by Shakespeare became an integral part of the English language through such linguistic projects as Samuel Johnson's A Dictionary of the English Language where one can find more quotes of Shakespeare than of any other writer. [3]

1. PRE-SHAKESPEARIAN ENGLISH

William Shakespeare wrote under the influence of such prominent English writers as Chaucer, Spenser and Sidney. Besides it is necessary to note the setting of Shakespeare's language. In the V century the Germanic tribes had moved to Britain. These tribes were the Angles, Saxons and Jutes. They teamed up with the local Celtic tribes in order to defeat their northern neighbors. After the victory, however, the Germanic tribes slowly pushed the Celts into the territory of modern Wales and Cornwall. The tribes spoke Anglo-Saxon language, often called the Old English language. This language survived the Norman invasion of 1066, which brought French to England. It was spoken mostly by common people and Anglo-Saxon noblemen who refused to speak French.

These events took place in the beginning of the Middle English period. In fact England became bilingual. Norman officials and supervisors spoke French as well as bilingual children born from French and English parents. English was, not in common use. The state and clergy preferred to speak Latin. The Norman rule ended with the King John's death. The decision of the Edward conquest of Wales contributed to increased usage of the English language. French culture was no longer supreme in England. The English language resumed its place as the dominant language of the land. As a result the dialectal differences were gradually smoothed out and the Standard English appeared.

Still French remained the official language in England until the XIV century and gave its positions only in 1509 when English became the official language. The rhetoric of the English language was deeply indebted to Chaucer. However, it is difficult to talk about innovations of the language, because there were few written records of that period. In the XV-XVI centuries there was an approximate shift from the Middle English to the Early Modern English, also called the language of the Renaissance. Before Shakespeare the future of the English language was uncertain, but by the time his last work was written, the literature of modern English was enriched, full of achievements and mature. [1]

2. CHANGES OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The structure of the early Modern English was unfixed. Its vocabulary changed constantly compared to static Greek or Latin languages. The English language absorbed words from foreign languages during wars, colonization and through diplomatic contacts. By the time Shakespeare started writing, English was widely used due to the expansion of physical sciences, philosophy and theology. Unfortunately the vocabulary of many writers of that time was too poor to express such ideas. That's why Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, Sir Philip Sidney, and William Shakespeare borrowed words from other languages to express new ideas and distinctions. In many cases they even invented new words, neologisms, themselves. They confirmed the positions of the English as the national language.

Scientists estimate that, during the XVI-XVII centuries Latin, Greek and modern Romance languages added more than 30,000 new words to the English language. Shakespeare's vocabulary as far as we can judge from his texts included approximately 17,000 words, several times larger than the vocabulary of most his educated contemporaries. He is supposed to be the author of about 3000 new words, because he was the first author to write them down.

3. SHAKESPEARE'S INNOVATIONS AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

William Shakespeare's works influenced not only theatre and literature, but the English language itself. He is widely regarded as the greatest writer of the English language [5], and his poetry and prose that have influenced a large number of great novelists and poets, including Charles Dickens and an Melville, continue to influence modern authors today. Shakespeare is the most quoted English-speaking writer [4], and a lot of his quotations are now repeated in many languages, not only in English.

Shakespeare was writing at the period of great cultural and intellectual development. It is the time of discoveries and innovations in arts and sciences. Scholars were taking a renewed interest in classical languages, and explorers and traders were making intrepid expeditions to the New World.

Shakespeare introduced new words and phrases which helped to enrich the language make it colorful and expressive. This is his greatest contribution to the native language. According to some estimations Shakespeare coined about several thousands of words. Warren King says that, Shakespeare uses 17,677 words in his texts and 1,700 were first used (that is written) by him. He is also known for borrowing from the classical literature and foreign languages. [1] We still use Shakespeare's phrases in conversations; they are a part of our language usage. For example: it's Greek to me, strange bedfellows, seen better days, a sorry sight, full circle, at one fell swoop, hold the mirror up to nature, I must be cruel only to be kind, love is blind, with bated breath, in my mind's eye, and so on. Shakespeare's effect on vocabulary is astounding especially taking into account that language has changed significantly since his lifetime.

People who struggle with understanding Shakespeare's language often say that one of the biggest problems is the vocabulary. Indeed, there are a lot of words unfamiliar to modern readers. To successfully understand Shakespeare's vocabulary one have to know some facts about his attitude to words.

First of all, according to the Oxford English Dictionary Shakespeare introduced about 3,000 new words. Besides William Shakespeare readily used obsolete words such as "wight" (man) or "ycleped" (called). He included insults in his plays to amuse the audience. That were the insults that everyone could enjoy – vulgar, cruel, comical, or just descriptive. A vivid example of his of his use of insults is the description of Kent, a rogue steward from "King Lear": a knave, a rascal, an eater of broken meats, three-suited, hundred-pound, fifthly-worsted-stocking knave; a lilly-livered… whoreson … finical rogue, one-trunk-inheriting slave"

Moreover he was facile in employing words and managed to use over 7,000 of them only once. It is more than the whole vocabulary of an average speaker of English.

A special vocabulary case is Shakespeare's common use of contractions. We also use contractions in everyday speech especially when chatting with friends. The most common Shakespeare's contractions are:

gi' = give

'tis = it is

ne'er = never

ope = open

o'er = over

oft = often

i' = in

a' = he

e'er = ever

e'en = even

Shakespeare made some stylistic improvements to a loose, spontaneous English language of his age. At that time words were written the same way they were spoken. There exist no formalized grammar rules binding the use of language. Sounds good for those who hates grammar rules, but the lack of rules of grammar caused vagueness in literature.

Another characteristic of this language was free expression of feelings. Shakespeare used the exuberance of the language in his prose and poetry to reach the average people. As a result we have a unique combination of majestic stateliness and racy tang peculiar to Shakespeare's language.[1]

Shakespeare created neologism, that's true, but it doesn't mean that he was the only one. Jonathan Hope who studied Shakespeare's works for many years, states that, his texts were cited more often and read more thoroughly, and, he is often said to be the first one to use some words or phrases which in fact belong to other authors.[6]

Another characteristic trait of Shakespeare's language are numerous compounds that he so readily used in his plays. They conform to poetic usage of the time and indicate specifically Shakespearian kind of English at the same time. The most commonly used types of compounds are:

1) Noun + Present Participle + Noun

heaven-kissing hill,

summer-swelling flower,

oak-cleaving thunderbolts,

sky-aspiring thoughts,

temple-haunting martlet,

beauty-waning widow,

night-tripping fairy,

2) Noun/Adj. + Present Participle + Noun

little-seeming substance,

summer-seeming lust,

3) Adv./Adj. + Present Participle + Noun

highest-peering hill,

lazy-pacing clouds,

fearful-hanging rock,

4) Noun + Past Participle + Noun

cloud-capped towers,

fen-sucked fogs,

star-crossed lovers,

tempest-tossed body,

5) Adv./Adj. + Past Participle + Noun

big-swoln face,

high-grown field,

down-fallen birthdom,

It would be interesting to analyze Shakespeare's works of different genres looking for the elements that influences further development of the English

language. Let's start with the blank verse as an important example of his influence. He experimented with the blank verse, trying to perfect it. Its rhythm gave Shakespeare enough freedom for experimentation. An outstanding feature of Shakespeare's poetry is the adaptation of speech rhythm to the blank-verse framework. He expressed emotions in the form of a verse, making a phrase flexible and spontaneous.

The blank verse rhythm is conversational, but in everyday conversations people tend to break the rhythmic pattern and make certain words more prominent, bring them into focus. Shakespeare too deviates from the perfect blank-verse line. In his plays such deviation means a change in the feelings or thoughts of the character or in a situation. With the change of the rhythm, the energy of the language changes too. For example, feel the abrupt, ragged the rhythm of the lines of "Macbeth":

$$/ \quad \Box/ \quad \Box \quad / \quad \Box \quad / \quad \Box \quad / \quad \Box$$
MACBETH: Throw physic to the dogs; I'll none of it.
$$/ \quad \Box \quad / \quad \Box/ \quad \Box \quad / \quad \Box \quad / \quad /$$
Come, put mine armour on; give me my staff.
$$/\Box \quad / \quad \Box \quad /\Box \quad \Box \quad // \quad \Box \quad \Box \quad /$$
Seyton, send out. Doctor, the thanes fly from me.
$$/ \quad \Box \quad / \quad /$$
Come, sir, dispatch.

In poetry Shakespeare introduced two main factors: verbal immediacy and stress of living emotion. [1] His words reflect passage of time, they give us an idea of the time frame. His capacity to convey emotions with simple words was remarkable:

"When my love swears that she is made of truth,

I do believe her, though I know she lies-"

— (Sonnet CXXXVIII)

Here he expresses complex and contradictory feeling in simple short words.

The sonnets as a literary form are limited structurally. Strict rules of the sonnets together with the vividness of the language make Shakespeare's writing style so intense. Complex human emotions were expressed by simple means of Shakespeare's language. His most memorable lines were written in iambic pentameter.

Various rhythm patterns and rhymes are used by Shakespeare to distinguish characters, for example the witches in Macbeth:

Double, double, toil and trouble

Fire burn and cauldron bubble,

The rhythm is not the only way of distinction here. You see that this is not an iambic line. For the witches Shakespeare has created another musical rhythm, four feet long and with the stresses reversed from the iambic.

Rhyme is also used for songs and epilogues, that are rather separate elements of the plays. So, Prospero ("The Tempest") says farewell to the audience in rhyme.

Another source for the sound of Shakespeare's speech, apart from rhymes, is the use of British dialects.

Shakespeare lived at the time of the transition from the Middle English to the Modern English. Linguists call this period the Great Vowel Shift. The length of the vowels was different from the one we are used to. The English of that time is also supposed to be rhotic. It means that the sound "r" was more prominent in phrases. These and some other features are obvious in Shakespeare's plays. For example:

1) /r/ pronounced post-vocalically

2) /ʊ/ was not lowered

3) wh was pronounced [ʍ]

4) mid-vowels were not diphthongised

5) /a/ after /w/ was not retracted

6) /a/ before /f, s, θ/ was short

7) /ɛ:, e:/ was not raised to /i:/

8) diphthongs /ai, au/ were centralized

9) short /u:/ was not very common

Besides simple rhymes and wordplay Shakespeare uses various rhetorical devices. Some of them are rather common (metaphor, simile), others are exotic (polysyndeton). Below we make a list of rhetorical devices in Shakespeare's texts. They are:

1) alliteration

"…. sessions of sweet silent thought...." (Sonnet XXX)

2) anadiplosis

"My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,

And every tongue brings in a several tale,

And every tale condemns me for a villain." (Richard III, V, iii)

3) anaphora

"Mad world! Mad kings! Mad composition!" (King John, II, i)

4) anthimeria

"I'll unhair thy head." (Antony and Cleoptra, II, v)

5) antithesis

"Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more."

(Julius Caesar, III, ii)

6) chiasmus

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (Macbeth, I, i)

7) diacope

"Put out the light, and then put out the light." (Othello, V, ii)

8) ellipsis

"And he to England shall along with you." (Hamlet, III, iii)

9) epanalepsis

"Blood hath bought blood, and blows have answer'd blows."

(King John, II, i)

10) epimone

"Who is here so base that would be a bondman? If any, speak; for him I have offended.

Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If any speak; for him have I offended."

(Julius Caesar, III,ii)

11) epistrophe

"I'll have my bond!

Speak not against my bond!"

(Merchant of Venice, III, iii)

12) hyperbaton

"Some rise by sin, and some by virtue fall." (Measure for Measure, II, i)

13) malapropism

"I do lean upon justice, sir, and do bring in here before your good honor two notorious benefactors."

"Are they not malefactors?" (Measure for Measure, II, i)

14) metaphor

" Made glorious summer by this son of York." (Richard III, I, i)

15) metonymy

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears." (Julius Caesar, III, ii)

16) onomatopoeia

"There be more wasps that buzz about his nose." (Henry VIII, III, ii)

17) parallelism

"And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover

To entertain these fair well-spoken days,

I am determinèd to prove a villain

And hate the idle pleasures of these days." (Richard III, I, i)

18) parenthesis

"...Then shall our names,

Familiar in his mouth as household words —

Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter,

Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester —

Be in their flowing cups freshly remembered." (Henry V, IV, iii)

19) polysyndeton

"If there be cords, or knives,

Poison, or fire, or suffocating streams,

I'll not endure it." (Othello, III, iii)

20) simile

"My love is as a fever, longing still

For that which longer nurseth the disease" (Sonnet CXLVII)

21) synecdoche

"Take thy face hence." (Macbeth, V, ii)

The above examples clearly illustrate that Shakespeare used a very broad arsenal of lexical and stylistic means to express the passions of the characters and the dramatic tension of situations. However, while speaking about his contribution to the English lexicon we forgot about his peculiar attitude to the English grammar. Indeed some of his phrases seem incorrect to modern readers. The completely break the rules of the English grammar. Some scholars even say that Shakespeare didn't obey the rules of grammar, because he didn't know them. That's a joke, of course. The truth is that the language in general and grammar rules in particular were much more flexible in that time than they are now. Hence the phrases with multiple negation, for example.

Besides, grammar rules undergone some changes with the time and the things that were normal during the Renaissance period are regarded incorrect today.

Speaking about Shakespeare's text, it is necessary to note some features peculiar to his use of grammar. The first one, of course is multiple negation. The poet used it for extra emphasis. For example:

Nor never could the noble Mortimer
Receive so many, and all willingly.

or

…love no man in good earnest, nor no further in sport neyther.

Another prominent feature of his writings is the presence of the old forms of verbs and pronouns, such as

- thou, thee instead of you, your (Come, thou monarch of the vine)
- doth instead of do (That doth invert the attest of eyes and ears)
- ; mine instead of my. (mine eye) and so on.

Questions and negatives in Shakespeare's texts are often formed without auxiliary verbs do or did. However it may be the normal practice at that time, not the poet's invention. For example: Goes the king? You look not well.

Rather frequent are the archaic verb forms with the –st ending, such as mistakest, canst, look'st, dost, etc.

All these features make his texts sound elevated and exotic for modern audience. Some people complain that they are difficult to understand, others suppose that unusual words and phrases add beauty to his verses, but they all agree that Shakespeare's writings are unforgettable masterpieces.

CONCLUSIONS

In this work we tried to cover the more prominent features of Shakespeare's language. However, we shouldn't automatically apply these features to the English of the Elizabethan era in general. Shakespeare manipulated the language skillfully, and he boldly brought new elements to the vocabulary. His was innovative in his choice and use of words, but the grammar of his language mostly reflects the general patterns of contemporary usage.

It is impossible to overestimate Shakespeare's impact on poetry and literature. His writings live through the centuries. He improved blank verse and became an acknowledged standard in poetry. Many great writers of the ages that follow were influenced by Shakespeare. His influence on the Romantic poets, for example, was so strong that George Steiner called their poems pale variations on Shakespearean themes.

Involuntary Shakespeare helped to establish new grammar rules and to widen vocabulary of the early modern English. He also enriched the arsenal of stylistic means of the English language.

THE LIST OF USED LITERATURE

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