

SPECIFIC FEATURES OF LITERARY VOCABULARY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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The wealth of the neutral stratum of words is often overlooked. This is due to their inconspicuous character. But their faculty for assuming new meanings and generating new stylistic variants is often quite amazing. This generative power of the neutral words in the English language is multiplied by the very nature of the language itself. It has been estimated that most neutral English words are of monosyllabic character, as, in the process of development from Old English to Modern English, most of the parts of speech lost their distinguishing suffixes. This phenomenon has led to the development of conversion as the most productive means of word-building. Word compounding is not so productive as conversion or word derivation, where a new word is because of a shift in the part of speech in the first case and by the addition of an affix in the second. Unlike all other groups, the neutral group of words cannot be considered as having a special stylistic colouring, whereas both literary and colloquial words have a definite stylistic colouring.

Common literary words are chiefly used in writing and polished speech. One can always tell a literary word from a colloquial word. The reason for this lies in certain objective features of the literary layer of words. What these objective features are, is difficult to say because as yet no objective criteria have been worked out. But one of them undoubtedly is that literary units stand in opposition to colloquial units. This is especially apparent when pairs of synonyms, literary and colloquial, can be formed which stand in contrasting relation.

It goes without saying that these synonyms are not only stylistic but ideographic as well, i.e. there is a definite, though slight, semantic difference between the words. But this is almost always the case with synonyms. There are very few absolute synonyms in English just as there are in any language. The main distinction between synonyms remains stylistic. But stylistic difference may be of various kinds: it may lie in the emotional tension connoted in a word, or in the sphere of application, or in the degree of the quality denoted. Colloquial words are always more emotionally coloured than literary ones. The neutral stratum of words, as the term itself implies, has no degree of emotiveness, nor have they any distinctions in the sphere of usage.

Both literary and colloquial words have their upper and lower ranges. The lower range of literary words approaches the neutral layer and has a markedly obvious tendency to pass into that layer. The same may be said of the upper range of the colloquial layer: it can very easily pass into the neutral layer. The lines of demarcation between common colloquial and neutral, on the one hand, and common literary and neutral, on the other, are blurred. It is here that the process of interpenetration of the stylistic strata becomes most apparent. Just as common literary words lack homogeneity so do common colloquial words and set expressions. Some of the lexical items belonging to this stratum are close to the non-standard colloquial groups such as jargonisms, professionalisms, etc. These are on the border-line

between the common, colloquial vocabulary and the special colloquial or non-standard vocabulary. Other words approach the neutral bulk of the English vocabulary. Thus, the words teenager (a young girl or young man) and hippie (hippy) (a young person who leads an unordered and unconventional life) are colloquial words passing into the neutral vocabulary. They are gradually losing their non-standard character and becoming widely recognized. However, they have not lost their colloquial association and therefore still remain in the colloquial stratum of the English vocabulary. So also are the following words and expressions: take (in "as I take it"= as I understand); to go for (to be attracted by, like very much, as in "You think she still goes for the guy?"); guy (young man); to be gone on (= to be madly in love with), pro (= a professional, e.g. a professional boxer, tennis-player, etc.).

The spoken language abounds in set expressions which are colloquial in character, e.g. all sorts of things, just a bit, How is life treating you?, so-so, What time do you make it?, to hobnob (= to be very friendly with, to drink together), so much the better, to be sick and tired of, to be up to something.

The stylistic function of the different strata of the English vocabulary depends not so much on the inner qualities of each of the groups, as on their interaction when they are opposed to one another. However, the qualities themselves are not unaffected by the function of the words, inasmuch as these qualities have been acquired in certain environments. It is interesting to note that anything written assumes a greater degree of significance than what is only spoken. If the spoken takes the place of the written or vice versa, it means that we are faced with a stylistic device.

Certain set expressions have been coined within literary English and their use in ordinary speech will inevitably make the utterance sound bookish. In other words, it will become literary. The following are examples of set expressions which can be considered literary: in accordance with, with regard to, by virtue of, to speak at great length, to lend assistance, to draw a lesson, responsibility rests.

If we speak about terms all scientists are responsible for devising a consistent terminology, a skeleton language to talk about their subject-matter. Philologists and philosophers of speech are in the peculiar position of having to evolve a special language to talk about language itself."

This quotation makes clear one of the essential characteristics of a term viz. its highly conventional character. A term is generally very easily coined and easily accepted; and new coinages as easily replace out-dated ones.

This sensitivity to alteration is mainly due to the necessity of reflecting in language the cognitive process maintained by scholars in analyzing different concepts and phenomena. One of the most characteristic features of a term is its direct relevance to the system or set of terms used in a particular science, discipline or art, i. e. to its nomenclature.

When a term is used our mind immediately associates it with a certain nomenclature. A term is directly connected with the concept it denotes. A term, unlike other words, directs the mind to the essential quality of the thing, phenomenon or action as seen by the scientist in the light of his own conceptualization.

Terms are mostly and predominantly used in special works dealing with the notions of some branch of science. Therefore it may be said that they belong to the style of language of science. But their use is not confined to this style. They may as well appear in other styles - in newspaper style, in publicistic and practically in all other existing styles of language. But their function in this case changes. They do not always fulfill their basic function, that of bearing exact reference to a given concept. When used in the belles-lettres style, for instance, a term may acquire a stylistic function and consequently become a SD.

The following is an example where a term is used as an SD.

"What a fool Rawdon Crawley has been," Clump replied, "to go and marry a governess There was something about the girl too."

"Green eyes, fair skin, pretty figure, famous frontal development" Squill remarked. (W. M. Thackeray)

The combination "frontal development" is terminological in character (used sometimes in anatomy). But being preceded by the word "famous" used in the sense indicated by the Shorter Oxford Dictionary as "a strong expression of approval (chiefly colloquial); excellent, capital" the whole expression assumes a specific stylistic function due to the fact that "frontal development" is used both in its terminological aspect and in its logical meaning "the breast of a woman".

Whenever the terms used in the belles-lettres style set the reader at odds with the text, we can register a stylistic effect caused either by a specific use of terms in their proper meanings or by a simultaneous realization of two meanings.

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