EXPLORING ETYMOLOGY IN HAMLET'S MONOLOGUES

Garima Gianchandani
Research Scholar
Deparment of English
Central University of Rajasthan,
Ajmer, Kishangarh, Rajasthan 305817

Abstract

Language is in a constant state of flux .Words with their corresponding semantic, syntactic and morphological structure keep changing from one generation to another. Therefore historical linguists study words synchronically and diachronically as a separate field called Etymology. One of the interesting facts is that the word "word" has also an etymological history, it (word) entered old English vocabulary from Germanic language, Dutch-"Woord", German-"Wort". Shakespeare's contribution to English Language and its words has been enriching, with unique phrases such as "Frailty thy name is woman."(Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 2) and words such as "Knave" and its many variations e.g lunatic- Knave, most-unjust Knave etc. The present paper explores the Etymology of some of the words used in the monologues of his play "Hamlet"

Keywords: Soliloquy, Etymology, Semantic change, Hamlet.

Introduction

It is engaging to understand the origin of words, how they travel through centuries attaining different meanings, connotations, dimensions, mental images etc. However, it is equally interesting to see how a word can acquire different meanings when used formally and when used in informal settings. The present paper is an attempt to explore the etymology prevalent in select words Shakespeare's play "Hamlet", especially in reference to its monologues.

History of English language

English officially starts somewhere in the middle of the fifth century, when the Germanic tribes (Goths, Angles, Lombard, Saxons, Franks, etc.) reached the British shores. English is a descendant of Germanic language family, but has also adapted and adopted words from languages such as French, Latin, Celtic, Scandinavian and Greek as a result of close contact with the native speakers of the said languages. For example "nice" came to English from Latin "nescius" meaning "ignorant", originally meant "foolish", "naïve" that is quite distant from its present meaning it has acquired i.e. "good" and "pleasing". Another dimension to the argument is, besides one standard variety of English, there are also varieties based on region, social class,

register, etc. such as American English, Black English Vernaculars, South Asian English. The journey of English to its present form can be divided into four periods, namely, Old English (450-1150), Middle English (1150-1500), Early Modern English (1500-1700), Modern (1700-present). It is evident from the above discussion that English language has a past of almost fifteen centuries, and close contact with sister Indo-European languages.

Understanding Etymology

"Etymology is the study of lexical history" (Crystal,136). It understands and examines the origin of individual lexeme, their affinities and subsequent semantic and morphological changes. It is interesting to know how the word "punch" has its origin in Hindi language carrying the meaning 'made of five ingredients', and contrary to popular belief the word does not relate to the impact the drink has on an individual. Another intriguing example is the word "grammar" traces its origin in the word "glamour" and meant the same back in time.

When Freud first started investigating the concept of 'hysteria' he had to face resistance because 'hysteria' originally meant "womb" associated to a woman, so "male hysteria" was impossible to understand for Freud's contemporaries. This phenomenon is known as *etymological fallacy*, where the original meaning of a lexeme in understood to be true.

The process of semantic change takes place because of number of reasons; some of the common reasons are extension or generalization, euphemism, cliché, specialization, deterioration, political correctness, figurative speeches, amelioration. Generalization, lexemes broadens its meaning spectrum to accommodate a more general form of meaning. Euphemism, where a lexeme develops variants so as to exist in polite company, eg "bathroom" created variants such as "rest-room", washroom". Cliché, where fragments of language dying but unable to die mainly due to overuse, eg phrases "tom, dick and harry", "at this moment in time". Specialization, when a lexeme becomes more specialized in its meaning. Deterioration, here a lexeme attains a negative sense to it, eg 'junta' means "dictorial". Political correctness, are words which are used to carefully avoid sensitive issues such as gender, race, sexual affinity etc example the word "sweet" when used in relation to a boy, hints at the boy's specific sexual orientation. Figurative language is much like words or utterance which encompasses much more than the literal meaning examples of it is metaphor, simile, hyperbole. Amelioration, where a lexeme gets positive connotations attached to its meaning example, "lean", doesn't bring to mind an abnormally thin body but on the contrary a healthy, athletic and good looks.

Another aspect of etymology is folk etymology, where in when people encounter a foreign word they try to create meaning by interpreting the known words, which could be wrong as well as not associated to the intended meaning. A typical example of folk etymology is "bridegroom", one wonders what "groom has to do with getting married, but a closer look would take us back to old English where "brydguna", here bryd- bride and guna-man.

Shakespeare's Contribution to the English Language

Shakespeare was born in Stratford, Warwickshire in 1564. He was married to Anne Hathway in 1582. The first association of Shakespeare to Theatre was recorded in 1594, he was thereafter known as one of the greatest playwright. "All textbooks on the history of English agree that the two most important influences on the development of language during the final decades of Renaissance are the works of Shakespeare (1564-1616) and the King James Bible of 1611" (Crystal, 62)."… extracts from both sources predominate in any collection of English quotations, eg. 'to be or not to be' (Hamlet, act 3, scene 1). Shakespearian impact on the English was

Research Scholar
ISSN 2320 – 6101
www.researchscholar.co.in
An International Refereed e-Journal of Literary Explorations

primarily on words and their supporting structures (syntactic, semantic), word-formation. He was excellent with the way he used his idiomatic expressions, more so true for the use of everyday idioms, such as 'beggars all description'(Antony and Cleopatra, act 2, scene2), 'a forgone conclusion' (Othello, Act 3, scene 3), 'in the mind's eye' (Hamlet, act 1, scene 1), etc. Shakespeare had an extraordinary sense of hyphenation, such as, faire-play, baby-eyes, break-vow, giant-world, widow-comfort, etc. It is also important to note that some words first recorded in the English language were invented and used by Shakespeare, eg, dwindle, accommodation, assassination, barefaced, lack-lustre, dislocate, courtship, eventful, etc

Hamlet's Monologues

Hamlet is one of the most celebrated tragedies of Shakespeare, written between 1599-1602, and was first enacted during that period. The protagonist the Prince Hamlet who is a well-educated and well-groomed, on his way back to the palace is stopped by a ghost. The ghost reveals the King was murdered and the queen has remarried his uncle, King Claudius, who also happens to be his murderer. The rest of the play is based on how Hamlet avenges his father's murder and in the process is killed. Like any tragedy of the time in Hamlet as well all the characters eventually die.

The first soliloquy falls in act one scene two, after King Claudius and Queen Gertrude, urge Hamlet in court to come out of the melancholy that is so evident in his personality. There are three thoughts that run parallel to each other in the monologue One, Hamlet is mourning the death of his father to whom he was very attached. Two, Hamlet disapproves his mother's second marriage to King Claudius. Third, the prince is in melancholic state of mind. There are words that are in line with underlying thoughts of monologue: 'sullied', 'everlasting', 'self-slaughter', 'weary', 'frailty', 'mourns'. None of these words have been invented by Shakespeare but as we know that he was good with hyphenation so "self-slaughter" is something which he has uniquely used, made of two words 'self' + 'slaughter'. 'Self' has a Germanic origin and also has affinity to Dutch 'zelf' and German 'selbe', initially the word was used with regard to the sense of 'I' and 'himself'; 'Slaughter' on the other hand has its origin in old Norse 'slatr' ' butcher's meat' and travelled to English in sixteenth century English 'slay', the word has retained its original meaning. On the same lines, word 'everlasting' again is a combination of two words ever + lasting; 'Ever' which has an unknown origin since there are no cognates found for it, however we could attach it to proto Germanic 'aiwi' mening 'vital force' and to old English 'aefre'; 'lasting' is a continuous form of 'last' which has its origin from old English 'laestan', German 'leisten' and meant 'something which has not yet ended'. 'Weary' has its origin in West Germanic 'werig' which exhausted and fatigue. 'Frailty' comes to English from Latin 'fragilis' and old French 'fraile'. 'Mourn' came to Old English from Germanic that is 'murnan' to 'mourn'

The second monologue features in act one scene five, after the ghost of the dead King reveals to Hamlet, King Claudius has killed the former King in order to gain his throne and his wife. The truth revealed leaves Hamlet in a state of extreme rage and revengeful disposition. This second monologue is pivotal in setting the stage for the play to unfold. There are a few words which are important in the monologue: 'sinews', 'remember', 'memory', 'record', 'villain'.'Sinewe': in modern times means the same as in the old English 'tendon' and has its origin in old Germanic, Dutch 'zeen' and German 'sehne'; the semantic co-ordinates of the word have not changed, however, the morphologically the final 'e' has been dropped in modern spelling.. 'Remember' has its origin in Late Latin re+memor (mindful) which then came late Latin as 'rememorari' which was passed on to old French 'remembrer' and finally to middle

English as 'remember'; the word today means'bringing to awareness'; the word has undergone both morphological and semantic changes. 'Memory' traces its origin from Latin 'memor' and then late latin as 'memoria' and then old French 'memorie' and finally in middle English as 'memory'. 'Record' originated from Latin 'cord' then in late Latin as 'recordari' moving on to old French 'recorder', old French 'record' finally entering middle English, maintaining its original meaning but with significant morphological changes.

The third monologue appears in act two scene two. Hamlet makes it clear that King Claudius is guilty of murder and is all set to take revenge from him. The words important in the monologue are rogue, dream, conceit, ignorant. 'Rogue' which at present times mean an dishonest and unprincipled man, originally meant 'beggar' in Old Latin 'roger from, 'rogare' 'beg, ask'. 'Dream' has a Germanic origin Dutch 'drrom' and 'German 'traum'. When the word was borrowed in old English it meant ' joy, music' and with gradual transition it now means ' series of thought and images during sleep'. It is intresting to know that in Shakespeare in his plays alternated between the two meanings of the word 'dream'. 'Conceit' meaning 'excessive pride in oneself' is an amalgamation of two words 'concieve' and 'deciet' and finally lead to middle English ' conciet'. 'Ignorant' originating from Latin 'ignorare' meaning 'not knowing' which was taken to old French and subsequently in English.

The next monologue is one of the most important in the play and is placed in act three and scene one. It is here words 'to be or not to be' first appears, unlike the other monologues which seem to be driven by emotion, in this monologue Hamlet is attempting to reason out and starts the internal debate to understand facts of existence and whether it is courageous to live or to die. The important words here are outrageous, respect, oppressor, native. 'Outrageous' comes from the old French word 'outrage' and initially carried the meaning 'excess of something' and did not carry the connotation of 'anger', however when it reached middle English in the late sixteenth century the meaning of the word transformed to 'extremely strong reaction of anger'. 'Respect' comes from two words of Latin 're' meaning 'back' and 'specere meaning 'look at', and Latin 'respecere' 'look back at, regard' moving on to Latin 'respectus' and entered middle English 'respect'. 'Oppressor' which comes from the latin verb 'opprimere' to Latin 'oppresis to old French and Englsih 'oppresion'. 'Enterprise' which in Latin had feminine connotation and word 'prehendre' meaning 'to take' to old French 'entreprendre', to old French 'enterprise' to late Middle English 'enterprise'. 'Native' means Latin 'nasci' to Latin 'nat' to Latin 'nativus' and finally to middle English 'native.

Another small monologue appears towards act two scene three. Queen Gertrude summons Hamlet to come to her room to have a word with him, however Hamlet asks for some alone time before the talk. The words of value in this monologue are: nero, daggers, hypocrities. 'Nero' which today seems to be a variant of negro meaning a black man more likely from African subcontinent came from Proto-fennic language meaning skill, ability, wit then borrowed in French, Slavic, etc. The word was used in ancient Rome. 'Daggers ' in middle English 'dag' meaning 'to pierce or stab' old French 'Dague' which means 'long dragger'. 'Hypocrities', modern spelling as 'Hypocrites' has a Greek origin 'hupokrites' and entered Latin and to old French 'ypocrite to English as 'hypocrisy'. 'Somever' in middle English in old English as 'sumor' and modern English as 'summer' has an Germanic origin, Dutch 'zomer, German 'sommer' and Sanskrit 'sama' all referring to a time of year when the wheather is extremely Hot.

The second last soliloquy in act three scene three. Hamlet after having proved the guilt of King Claudius is on the verge of killing him through his sword but refrains himself as a thought strikes him that if he kills the guilty King while praying, he would go to heaven, which will not

be a punishment at all. Hamlet strongly felt that his father had been cheated by King Claudius and should be punished under all circumstances. The important words in this are horrid, incestuous, damned. 'Horrid' has its roots in Latin 'horrere' meaning tremble, shudder, etc', later Latin 'horridus and finally sixteenth century middle English 'horrid' to its modern meaning 'causing horror'. 'Incestuous' is compound form with its root word as 'incest' originating from two Latin words 'in' meaning 'not and 'cest' meaning 'chaste' and was borrowed in English as one word 'incest' and 'incestuous' meaning 'guilty of incest'. 'Damned' in latin 'damnum' meaning 'loss or damage' to Latin 'dampner' meaning 'to cause loss' to old French 'dampner' to middle English 'damn' which meant 'suffering given by God as a form of punishment'.

The last soliloquy appears in act four scene four. Hamlet contemplates his inability to avenge his father despite sufficient motive and cause. He to a large extant demeans himself by saying what is the value of a man if all he does is eat and sleep. Hamlet strongly condemns the fact that he has not been able to execute his revenge. The important words are capability, hath, fantasy. 'Capability' which in modern interpretation means 'having the ability or qualities required a give task'; originated from Latin 'capere' meaning 'take on hold' to late Latin 'capabilis to French 'capable meaning 'able to take in'. The word 'capable' when borrowed from French to English also had the same meaning as the French counterpart. 'Hath' used in old English as second person singular has had a spelling transition is modified to modern 'have' which carries the meaning of ' a sense of duty'. 'Fantasy' interpreted as a 'faculty to imagine the impossible' has its origin in Greek 'phantazein' which travelled to Latin 'phantasid' to old French 'fantasie' and finally to middle English as 'phntasy' and is used with modified spelling 'fantasy' today.

Conclusion

English apart from a descendant of Germanic language has a huge corpus of words borrowed from Latin, French, Greek, Old Norse etc. While some of the words have preserved their morphological and semantic structures, other words have undergone significant changes. The play *Hamlet* and close investigation of the etymology of words used in it reveals some interesting facts about the vocabulary and creativity that Shakespeare possessed. The present paper due to lack of space deals with extremely narrow scope, there is a lot of work still left unfinished.

References

Crystal, David, *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of The English Language. (.*2nd ed.) . Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2005. Print.

Gelderen, Elly Van, *The History of English Language. (1*[st] *ed,).* John Benjamin Publication Company: Philadelphia, 2006. Print.

Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*. Spark Publication: USA, 2003. Print.

Wedgwood, Hensleigh*, The Critical History of English Language* (3rd ed.). John Child and Sons: Illinois, 2009. Print.

Crystal, David and Ben Crystal*, Shakespeare's Words, A Glossary and Language Companion*. Penguin Books; London, 2002. Print.