

ENGLISH IN MOTION. FLEXIBLE WHOPPER

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A recent survey found that about 500 companies spending more than \$3 billion a year retraining employees in basic English.

Reality of life sowing us changes in everything, so, there is no surprise English became so variable and its rules are a bit discretionary nowadays.

When we use abbreviation, use words in new meanings, forget about constructing grammatically correct sentences, we apply to a faster lifestyle, technology improvement, dialect variation and a million of other reasons to excuse ourselves.

But is there anything we have to be excused for? Let`s find it out.

It is well known, that the English language is the most wide spread in the world. There are British, American, Australian, Indian, Jamaican and thousands of other language variants without counting differences inside English speaking countries.

As it is logical to divide language into sections to make it easier to study, there are the same directions in English transformation, they are: lexical, phonetic and phonological, spelling, semantic and grammatical changes.

It is obvious, that phonetic and phonological changes are mostly noticeable. Particularly in different language variants, while the other four can be applicable to English globally.

Let`s overlook lexical changes first.

We are filling up our everyday life vocabulary with technical words, Internet slang and messaging where the usage of shorten word forms is important to save typing time. Messages is “the place” where as many letters as possible are to be substituted with one or two symbols, such as, particle *to* with the number 2 or preposition *for* with the number 4. Due to this conditions the language should adequately adapt to meet all the requirements of our lives, for instance, it is an easier way to say *LOL* rather than *laughing out loud*, or *BTW* instead of *by the way*, *b4* – *before*, *cya* or *CU* – *see you*, *k*, *K*, *kk* – *O.K.*

Well, online community is joking that soon *there will be an acronym for everything = stwbaafe.*

Furthermore, a new vocabulary is required for the latest inventions, such as transport, domestic appliances and industrial equipment, or for sporting, entertainment and leisure pursuits: *E-mails* – *electronic mail*; *WWW* – *World Wide Web*; *pic* – *picture*, plural: *pix*, *pic*; *proggy* – *computer program*; *addy* – *address*; *edutainment* – *education + entertainment* etc.

Language also changes very subtly whenever speakers communicate. There are no two individuals who speak identically: people from different geographical places usually speak in a different way, but even within the same small community there are variations according to a speaker`s age, gender, ethnicity and social and educational background.

Through interactions with these different speakers from all over the world English encounters new words, expressions and pronunciations and integrates them into itself. From Mexico English has *tacos*, *guacamole*, from America – *moose*, *chipmunk*, *raccoon*, *jazz*, *freeway*, *parking lot*, *subway*, *diapers* and *candies*. Dutch brought *coleslaw* and *cookies* as well as German invested in vocabulary *pretzels* or Italians – *pizza* and *pasta*. From India we know *yoga* and *bungalow*, while Australia shared with English its *nuggets*, *boomerang* and *walkabout*. Scary *voodoo* and *zombie* were borrowed from Africans.

Another way of enlarging English lexis is a society – social groups uprise their slang words to the level of total exploitation. This can be proved even with a common word *sport*. Usually it characterizes any physical activity, but you can also say: *I am sporting a t-short* (putting it on), or you can call a young guy saying: *Hey, sport!*

Some young people prefer to write words in the same way as they pronounce them, this tendency came from Afro-American English speakers: *da* instead of *the*, *ima* instead of *I am*.

Another interesting example that came from the same social group – putting positive meaning into negative words *bad* and *bitch*, if to apply them to a man and a woman, will have approving sense. By the way, comparison form *baddest* – is an urban form *coolest*, nevertheless can be used as *the worst*.

You may also see replacement of basic phrases or words in order to be politically correct – no *Mrs* or *Miss* in magazines or newspapers, only *Ms*, this is pretty tolerant, because nobody should actually know somebody's marital status. It is not commonly easy to see a component *man* in words, so *chairman* is replaced by *chairperson*, *congressman* is changed to *congressperson*. In order to make mass media more tolerant there is a thought to implement artificial pronoun *thon* when the profession named in a text is impersonal.

Phrases that are used widely shows paradoxicalness in forming expressions: *for all intents and purposes. That was an awfully nice dinner you just served me.*

One of today's "in" words – *unbelievable* means that somebody doesn't believe in something, but it is used to show a feeling of surprise.

Words, by the way, have an ability to gain new meanings, but this process mostly is proceeded in a chain, where one meaning is created after another one in a particular order.

Here are some examples that will make it more specific.

1. Words can be changed in a meaning when a society gets a new denotation – an object or phenomenon. The word *core* was well known as a *horny capsule containing seeds of apple, pear* etc., after electrical engineering made a step forward *core* had gained another meaning – *a bar of soft iron forming the center of electro-magnet or induction coil.*

2. Word sense comes different if the notion of something is changed, that is why a *probe* used to mean *a surgical instrument for exploring wounds*, later it became an *instrument for exploring outer space (e.g. a lunar probe).*

3. Moreover, a meaning of the word changes with a simple change of its denotation. *To sail* used to mean – *traveling over the sea*, but up to date *sailing* means *travel over, glide through.*

4. Another phenomenon is euphemistically replacement, which is observed for the reason to make thoughts more politically correct. So, instead of using *cancer, rumour* it is more polite to say *growth* and instead of *fatal – inoperable*. It is also important to mention *pass away, perish, join the better, kick the bucket, go to green pastures* instead of *die*.

Once we fill up our life with new stuff, we need words to name it, words to operate with some processes, to make life easier, to help everyone understand each other, it is necessary to standardize terms. We should invent new words as well as new things in order to name them.

As for word creation, there are several similar methods. One is called blending and it operates with full words or their parts simply composing them: *motel = motor + hotel, brunch = breakfast + lunch, transistor = transfer + resistor, bionics = biology + electronics; medicare = medical + care* etc.

Another method is more common and complex – abbreviation, that can be divided into several subgroups:

- 1) initial:
 - alphabetic – where words are pronounced as letters in the Alphabet: *BBC*, *MP*, *PC* etc.;
 - letter-sound: *VTOL* [vi:tol] = *Vertical Take-Off and Landing*;
 - acronyms – words are read as they supposed to be pronounced according to the reading rules: *NATO* [ˈneɪtəʊ], *UFO* [ˈju:foʊ], *LASER* [ˈleɪ zər].
- 2) combined, which means connection of truncation with initial abbreviations: *Univac* = *Universal automatic computer*.

Abbreviation method is judged as the most artificial way of word creation, it also can be unclear in the etymology, as it is with *AIDS* = *acquired immunodeficiency syndrome* or *LASER* = *light amplification by simulated emission of radiation*.

Nevertheless, abbreviation can participate in word compounding itself: *STOL* (*short take-off and landing*) + *port* = *STOLport*; *MATS* (*Military Air Transport Service*) + *man* = *MATSman*.

In addition, abbreviations may be used as a base for conversion: *RAF* (*Royal Air Force*) creates the verb *to raff*, *DHL* (*composed with first letters of creators names*) – *to DHL / DHLed*.

As we already mentioned, dialects and international expansion can be blamed for English transformation, but not only a vocabulary grows, grammar rules are hard to be followed strictly, and not only the influence of language variation makes it so different.

On the first place we do not pay attention to our speech, where grammar mistakes are not so noticeable. For example, nowadays people have problems with distinguishing one or more objects by a distinct form, the plural e.g. *one table*, *two tables*, *many tables*, how English speakers did it before. Or, have you ever heard people saying: “*A large amount of pigeons flew by*”. “*We found less pigeons than we expected*”.

English once distinguished nouns referring to substances that are always in the singular by using *amount* for singular substances and *number* for countable objects in the plural: *A large amount of Kool-Aid, ambition, coffee, or crawfish gumbo. A large number of pigeons, bullwhips, armadillos, or blueberry pies*.

The same distinction was made by *less* and *fewer*. *Less* was used only if the noun was uncountable: *less Kool-Aid, less coffee, fewer crawfish* but *less crawfish gumbo. Fewer* was applied to countable objects: *fewer bullwhips, fewer armadillos, and fewer blueberry pies*.

The number of suffixes for marking grammatical functions like the number, person, tense is rapidly dropping. The suffixes like *-dom*, *-ery*, *-ess* and many other are no longer being added to new words.

The result of this is that the suffixes we are left with have to serve more and more functions. For example, the suffix *-s* is used to mark the following:

The plural: *ant-s, launching-s, door-s*.

The 3rd singular Present tense of verbs: *He/she/it run-s, smell-s, plunge-s*.

Making nouns of adjectives: *linguistic-s, acrobatic-s, mathematic-s*.

The possessive case: *George's, Bush's, the anaconda's* (ignore the apostrophe since you can't hear it).

This brings us to the evidence that at least US English-speakers are losing their grasp of the plural: plural number is often confused with nonplural uses. For instance, “*Bosco's are having a big sale this week*”. “*Logistics are not my forte*”.

Now these examples are just speech errors, till they become a pattern of common use.

Do we really need *-s* when we already have *many, five, few* in the sentence?

As it is always a problem with the borrowed words usage, the plural formation for them has language style restrictions. If the plural is formed with *-s*, then it can be adequately

used for both conversational and science language: *cactus* – *cactuses* / *cacti*, *formula* – *formulas* / *formulae* etc.

Some nouns with the plural form made by adding -s are used only in speaking: *appendix* – *appendixes* / *appendices*, *corpus* – *corpora* / *corpuses*, *spectrum* – *spectra* / *spectrums* etc.

The other nouns that have both the plural form created by adding -s and the borrowed form – have a strict style usage and differences in meanings, such as *antennas* (*radio antennas*), *antennae* (*two huge antennae instead of claws*).

There can be discretions in writing abbreviations, dates, numbers, symbols. It used to be normal to create their plural form, but you can often see variants like 1960s, PCs.

Not only nouns are hard to operate with. There are also variations in the formation of the degrees of adjectives comparison.

In addition to the adjectives capable for forming degrees of comparison with both a synthetic and analytical method (adjectives ended with *-le* (*gentle*, *simple*, *subtle*), *-er* (*clever*), *-ow* (*shallow*, *narrow*), *-y* (*happy*), as well as ternary adjectives formed by adding the prefix *un-* before adjectives ended with *-y* (*unhappy*, *unlucky*)) in English both of these ways are inherent to two-syllable adjectives such as *common*, *cruel*, *handsome*, *likely*, *mature*, *obscure*, *pleasant*, *polite*, *remote*, *stupid*. E.g. “*Marvel also falls into the even commoner error of images...*” or “*Britain is definitely a pleasanter land than it was 30 years ago*”.

It is possible to create a comparison degree with the analytical method for one-syllable adjectives when one adjective is compared with another one: “*Guns: More Good than Bad or Ugly*”.

This can't be named as a change, but irregular verbs, that have a regular form also proves the English language variables and can be confusing, they are used both as Past Indefinite (PI) and as Past Participle (PP): *burn* – *burnt/burned*, *light* – *lit/lighted*, *fit* – *fitted/fit* etc.

Verbs with two Past Participle: *mow* – *mowed/mown*, *swell* – *swollen/swelled*, *wake* – *woken/waked* etc.

If the verb has two forms for either PI and PP they usually are used in different meanings. The verb *to bid*, e.g. “*He had bidden her to buy the best*”. “*They had bid down the chemical company's stock*”. It is also applicable to the word *shine* (*shone*, *shone* / *shined*, *shined*), *relay* (*relayed*, *relayed* / *relaid*, *relaid*) and others.

Grammar rules also oblige us to use defining nouns in the singular (except nouns that don't have the singular form), but nowadays the usage of *a savings account*, *a drinks cabinet*, *a greetings card*, *the arrivals hall* is slowly changing that rule.

This short overview gives just a cursory glance on variability of the English language. This might be pretty normal that it has the ability to acquire a new vocabulary, structures and give an opportunity to develop and modify its grammatical basis.

Nowadays life is so accelerating and it gives us a lot of possibilities. We have started to travel more and in foreign countries we hear even more language errors and inaccuracies, they all became our language speaking practice and sometimes we, those who study the English language as a second, are involved in the process of its development and transformation, that is why it is necessary to pose a question: “If native English speakers do not care about language rules, will it be normal when those who learn English won't get even a half of its true fundamentals?”.

In my opinion, a person must study basic rules and regulations first, but at the same time should not miss an opportunity to remember deviations from them, to be in a “language trend”. So, this may be the only way for companies not to spend anormous amount of money for teaching us the language, native or foreign.