

Latin Borrowings

The adoption of Latin words into the English language began when the English were still living in their Germanic homeland, and had some in contact with Roman civilization. They represented objects taken over from that civilization, and among them are the words - street, wine, butter, cheese, silk, mile and mint etc.,

The Roman occupation of Britain (78-410 A.D.) had also left certain words which the Anglo-Saxons took over, e.g. - castra (town) survives in Chester, Winchester, Doncaster, etc.,. A second period of the influx of Latin words ~~occured~~ came with the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. It brought into English language many words belonging to Christian religion, such as, minister (from Latin, monasterium), monk (Latin, Monachus), bishop (Latin, episcopus), priest (Latin, Presbyter), and Church (Latin, cysium) etc.,. But the largest influx of Latin words occurred from the time of the Renaissance. These are easily distinguishable from the previous strata by the fact that they are mostly learned words, representing the development of abstract and scientific thought

through the study of classical literature and philosophy. The English for a variety of causes incorporated these foreign words more readily and extensively, principally, because they were in the habit of importing French words to which the Latin expressions had a close resemblance. Indeed, some words like consolation, grace, gravity, infernal, infidel, position, solid etc., may have come ^{either} from Latin or from French. A large number of French words were also given a Latin shape — French parfait appeared in English as parfait or perfet upto the 17th century, but later became perfect to give it a Latin look. Similarly, avis, aventure, paynture became advice, adventure and picture. Among other words dette became debt, doute — doubt, bataille — battle, vittle — victual, bankrot — bankrupt, langage — language and egal — equal etc.,

Again, many French and Latin forms co-exist e.g., complaisance and complacence base and basis, certainly and certitude, critic and critique: (in the last two examples, a difference in meaning has crept in).

Many Latin derivatives

have changed significance from their original meaning: e.g., enormous (Latin 'irregular'), item (Latin 'also'), Ponder (Latin 'to weigh'), Climax (Gk. 'a ladder'), Bathos (Latin 'depth') etc.

Technical words from Classical roots or adaptation of old words to express new ideas: e.g., eventual, immoral, primal, annexation, Climatic and fragmentary etc. A large number of words ending in -ism belong to this category: e.g., classicism, individualism, realism, mannerism, Marxism etc. Similarly, words ending in -ist also belong to this very category: e.g., dentist, oculist, tourist, copyist, scientist, individualist etc.

Latin has influenced English not only in vocabulary, but also through a limited way, its syntax and style. Jespersen thinks that the use of the relatives who, which and that prevailed in English language because of their conformity with Latin relative pronouns. Regarding style, the great masters of English style are not the Latin scholars, but Bunyan and Defoe who used Latin expressions seldom.

Many English Nouns have Latin Adjectives ^{such}

as Mouth - oral; nose - nasal; mind - mental;
 son - filial; middle - medieval; book - literary;
 town - urban ~~and~~ etc.,

Often Latin adjectives have enriched the English language by providing a synonym with some difference in meaning. e.g., 'Juvenile' and 'youthful'; 'ponderous' and 'weighty'; 'miserable' and 'wretched'; 'legible' and 'readable' etc. The English word is more concrete and expressive than its Latin equivalent.

Classical elements have introduced a kind of jargon that is much evident in the use of newspapers. For example, instead of saying 'a great crowd came to see' they favour 'a vast concourse of people assembled to witness.' Similarly, 'disastrous conflagration' for great fire; 'sequestered the services of a physician for' 'called a doctor.'

English language is so prone to this kind of uses that even Wordsworth with all his condemnation of poetic diction, could not resist its temptation, when he wrote 'natal day' for 'birth day' or 'the fragrant beverage drawn from China's herb' for 'tea'.

The End

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