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Role of French Words in Enriching English Vocabulary among Non-native Adult Learners of English

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ABSTRACT

This research paper aims at exploring the different shades of French influences on English language across different periods. The French words have been a potential source of enriching English vocabulary that necessitate proper attention, especially for non-native learners of English who usually find these French words challenging to master. With a historical perspective, French words have been dealt with here to facilitate their acquisition among non-native learners of English. A taxonomic and analytical approach taken into account in this case, turns out to be very handy for such targeted learners and this has been validated in this paper. Diagrams and charts have been used adequately to add to the clarity of ideas.

Key words: taxonomy, perspective, acquisition, etc.

Several researchers have established the fact that vocabulary plays a very crucial role in learning and teaching any language. The learning of English as a second or a foreign language is not an exception to this as learners devote much effort and time to understand, enhance and use their vocabulary. Sincere semantic explorations till date have brought-forth many techniques in this domain which are used to help language learners solve the problems in learning and expanding their vocabulary.

To understand a language better, a learner has to have a general idea about the history or origin of the target language that is English here.

The history of English language generally begins with Germanic invasion of Britain in the 5th Century A.D. Angles, Saxons and Jutes drove the native British Celtic speaking population to Scotland

and Ireland in the North and Wales in the South. The dominant tribe Angles christened the island as Angle land or England that gave their language the name 'English'.

The English language has seen three periods in its development. They are conventionally known as Old English (450 to 1150), Middle English (1150 to 1500) and Modern English (1500 to 1800), and consequently, late Modern English after 1800s. The Old English was spoken by the Germanic tribes that was much different from the current language but it had about half of the vocabulary with Old English (OE) roots (be, strong, water, etc) up to 1100. Scottish and Northumbrian dialects retained many features of Old English in vocabulary and pronunciation.

In 10th and 11th Century, old English was influenced by Old Norse of Norsemen who invaded

Britain. The lexical roots of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian were similar to divergent grammar. As Christianity swept across the continent around 600 AD, about 400 Latin words were added to English, as 'priest', 'paper', 'school' and fewer words from Greek.

The majority of French words that now appear in English entered the language after 1066, that is, after William the Conqueror and his Norman French troops defeated Harold and his English bands at the Battle of Hastings. After the Norman conquest of 1066 AD, a French dialect called Old Norman influenced English. William, the Conqueror Duke of Normandy (Northern France) annexed England and the Royal Court Patronized French into nobility, business class or the upper class, whereas the commoners spoke English. This Middle Era was the Age of Chaucer but it is still incomprehensible to people today. The idiomatic, concrete and descriptive style symbolized Anglo-Saxon flavour whereas intellectual and abstract ideas symbolised the Latin and French influence. Major grammatical changes occurred by the shift in decline of 'en' form to 'e' or 's'. Approximately 10,000 French and Norman words made inroads into English.

Towards the end of Middle English, a sudden and perceptible change in pronunciation (the Great Vowel Shift) made the vowel pronunciation shorter and shorter. Early Modern English (1500-1800) was influenced by Renaissance classical wave. The printing press revolutionised English as the first English Dictionary hit the world in 1604.

The Late Modern English from 1800 onwards was marked by its evolved vocabulary due to the Industrial Revolution and Colonial conquests. The sun never set on the British Empire and English adopted many foreign words from various countries. This led to the emergence of British and American English which are spoken currently by more than one billion people.

Dennis (1960) indicated that "English is derived from the Germanic and contains many words from Latin, Greek, French, German and other languages", so most of the terms employed in art, science, mental and moral philosophy are from Greek and Latin. Abbot and Cable (1978) defined

English as the language of a group of Germanic tribes (viz-Frank, Goths, Angles, Saxons, Vandals and Lombard's) after they arrived in Britain.

The Latin influence of the second period was not only extensive but thorough and marks the real beginning of the English habit of freely absorbing foreign elements into its vocabulary. They declared that Classical language is a dead language because it has not changed for 2000 years. Old English has lost much of its vocabulary (Pyles and Algeo, 1982) and English vocabulary owes most of its words to foreign languages, borrowing heavily from Latin, Greek and French.

Knowing about the origin of English words is a valuable asset for L2 learners, as it helps in understanding the real spirit of the language (Ausbel, Novak & Hanesian, 1968). 30% words of English language are native but they are still in current usage as they possess a broad range of lexical and syntactic structures (Klein, 1966). Sergeant (1873) working on foreign words into English classified the four chief sources- viz. French Origin, German Origin, Greek Origin and Latin Origin. Linguists like Finkenstaedt, Wolff, Nauhaus and Herget (1973), Williams (1986) show the percentage of borrowed words from Latin, French, Germanic, Greek and others as 29%, 29%, 26%, 06% and 10% respectively. Skeat (1892) holds that English language consists of 178 Anglo Saxon root words and 280 others, the majority of which are borrowed from Latin or Greek. Henry (1993) reported 12 Latin and 2 Greek roots besides 20 other most frequently used prefixes that generated about 100, 000 words.

The role of vocabulary in English language learning

It is a universally acceptable fact that any language serves fundamentally the purpose of communication, and the conveyance of idea is the expressed objective in this act. This has been the basic factor behind the origin of languages. The diversity in structure of a language enables it to successfully carry forward diverse sets of meaning that accommodate concrete and abstract aspects of life. This phenomenon of encapsulation of meaning is executed with the help of words and their arrangements in sentences. Each of these words has meaning that is determined according to the context and presentation in sentences. From this

perspective, it is meaning of words that play the central role in communication of ideas. The English language has a very rich repertoire of vocabulary that has generously accepted words from different languages. The process of enrichment is still continuing as this language is constantly including words from other languages. The compendious *Oxford English Dictionary* has listed 616,500 word-forms including headwords of main entries, combinations, derivatives, and phrases (Elert, n.d). The number of words in *Webster's Third International Dictionary* (1963), the largest non-historical dictionary of English, has been investigated by two studies (Dupuy, 1974; Goulden, Nation & Read, 1990). In order to estimate the most accurate number, the researchers excluded compound words, archaic words, abbreviations, proper names, alternative spellings, and dialect forms. These studies reached the point that the *Third International Dictionary* includes 54,000 word families. Nagy and Anderson (1984) said that people are exposed to roughly 88,700 different word families while in school between Kindergarten and grade 12.

Bauer and Nation (1993) investigated the importance of word families and word forms in order to find a systematic approach to vocabulary teaching and to determine the vocabulary load of texts. They define a word family as a base word and all its derived and inflected forms that can be understood by a learner without having to learn each form separately. For example, the word family for the word *teach* includes teaches, teaching, taught, teachable, teacher, and teachers, etc. A word form is a particular form of a lexical item occurring in certain grammatical environments. For example, the singular *flower* and its plural *flowers* are two different word forms representing the single lexical item *flower* in different grammatical circumstances. The derived and inflected words are the different forms of the base word. If a learner knows the meaning of the base word in the word family, he can easily understand the meaning of the rest of the words in the family. In this way, the learner can increase his knowledge of any given word family by developing his morphological knowledge. Some researchers consider any word

and its different forms as separate items while others count these as one word. For example, *dance*, *dancing*, and *dances* can be regarded as one word by some scholars because they are members of the same family, while other scholars may count them as three separate words. These differences in treatment of words may be attributed to a variety of needs for interpretation experienced by scholars of varied interests.

English has turned out to be the lingua franca of global communication. Many English words are borrowed directly from other languages, such as Latin, German, Greek, French, Arabic and many others, which have contributed to the richness of this language. Therefore, the learning English language requires a very sound vocabulary, especially for the Libyan learners who learn it as a foreign language. Levine and Reves (1990) believe that one of the biggest obstacles that students of English as a foreign language (EFL) face is the lack of adequate vocabulary, which hinders text comprehension. According to Levine and Reves, a well-known approach to vocabulary learning is based on the belief that vocabulary can be acquired only through reading instruction. That means students should be exposed to unfamiliar texts with a significant amount of new words in order to acquire vocabulary (both specialized terminology and general vocabulary). However, many students do not prefer this approach since it leaves them with only partial comprehension of the texts. O'Malley, Chamot, Manzanares, Russo and Kupper (1985) define learning strategies as "any set of operations or steps used by a learner that will facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval or use of information" (p.23). Brown (1994) referred to learning strategies as specific "attacks" that language learners apply when faced with a problem, that is, cognitive steps applied to facilitate language acquisition.

Extensive research has been conducted on teaching vocabulary to new language learners but a unanimous opinion still eludes as this process of teaching and learning of a new language to an alien set of learners involves a lot of variables ranging from the background of the learners to the linguistic features of the target language, that is to say, it is a highly subjective area. A sensitive look at the corpus

of research undertaken so far in this field and the existing condition in Libyan setting, it can be proposed that much reliance on morphological analysis of words of Greek, Latin, German and French origin turns out to be the most useful tool for teaching vocabulary. The morphological knowledge of the components of a word largely facilitates the learning of new words. In this method, students apply morphological analysis when they read or hear a complex word that they have never encountered before. They analyze the words to see if they recognize any of the pieces (White, Power, & Sheida, 1989). Because English has borrowed many words from different foreign languages, students should learn how to analyze the different parts of any new word. Mastering such skills will equip students with a useful tool to decode most unfamiliar words in a given text (Nation, 2001).

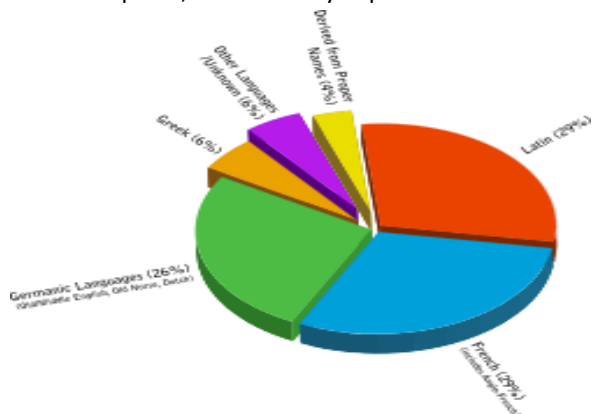
Morphological awareness refers to the ability to reflect upon and manipulate morphemes and to control word formation processes (Koda & Zehler, 2008). According to Al Farsi (2008), morphological analysis is the learners' ability to learn morphemes and morphemic boundaries by disassembling complex words into meaningful parts and reassembling the meaningful parts into new meanings. For example, the idea of prefix *anti-* that bears negative connotation can help any learner guess the meaning of words with this prefix. Likewise the case with many suffixes that give adequate hint of meaning along with the grammatical class. Koda and Zehler (2008) believe that there is a strong relationship between morphological awareness and the ability to read in either the first language (L1) or second language (L2). Furthermore, Kuo and Anderson (2006) believe that morphological awareness can make students more aware of the writing system by recognizing spelling and phonological irregularities. Recently, Koda and Zehler have investigated the importance of morphological awareness as a key element of vocabulary knowledge in L1 reading. According to Nurhemida (2007), a few studies have examined the role of morphological awareness in L2 vocabulary development. These studies concluded that morphological awareness may be a key element in vocabulary acquisition. One such study was

conducted by Wysocki and Jenkins (1987). They found that the students' ability to learn new words originates from forming new words by using previously acquired roots. These researches have amply proved the effectiveness of morphological approach in teaching vocabulary items to new learners of a language.

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

The impact of French on English language is profound as the French-English intensive language contact occurred in the Middle English period, beginning with the Norman Conquest. The changes influenced both English Grammar and vocabulary. A large number of words entered after 1066 when William the Conqueror, as the Normans ruled over Britain for about 200 years.

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



The percentage of modern English words derived from each language group are as follows:

French: ~29%

Latin (including words used only in scientific / medical / legal contexts): ~29%

Germanic: ~26%

Others: ~14%

Baugh (1963) states "The total number of French words adopted during Middle English was slightly over 10000, of these about 75 percent are still in common use" (p.215). The greatness of the French influence made some scholars doubt whether the English vocabulary can properly be regarded as typical of a Germanic language. However, it should be mentioned that in spite of the great number of French loan words, the common core of the English vocabulary and most of the words which belong to everyday language are still English.

What makes a nation borrow words from another language has been clearly stated by Dr. J.A. Sheard (1962), "The acquisition of loan words from another language shows that the borrower feels that there is something superior in the foreign language, or in the people who use it, for we may suppose that no reasonable being would deliberately make use of foreign words if he felt that his own language possessed words which did the job better." (p. 26-27) Sheard, J. A. (1962) .*The Words We Use*. Great Britain: Tonbridge PrintersLTD.

Affixes

With the borrowing of a large number of French words, French affixes found their ways into English. Moreover, the English suffixes were also added to French loan words. Hybrid words of this kind are found in comparatively great numbers in most languages. However, the hybrid of the other kind which is composed of a native stem and a foreign ending such as *bearable*, *breakage*, *hindrance*, *murderous* and *bakery* are in most languages rarer than they are in English. Some of the French affixes which entered English are as follows. (French has borrowed some of its affixes from other languages.)

Prefixes: *con-*, *de-*, *dis-*, *ex-*, *pre-*, *en-*, *pro-*, *trans-*.

Suffixes: *-ee* , *-ance*, *-ant*, *-ation* , *-ment*, *-ism*, *-ity*, *-able*, *-al* , *-ous*, *-fy*, *-ize*.

French words have a valuable presence in the English vocabulary in politics, law economy, war, church. The following list shows some of the French loan words:

Government: people, parliament, crown, reign, treaty, council, cabinet, city, minister, nation, village, domicile, etc.

Law: attorney, felony, larceny, judge, jury, justice, estate, sue, fee, plea, defendant, prison, suit, advocate, complaint, summon, court, accuse, bill, act, tax, lease, assets, embezzle, disclaim, etc.

Military: army, navy, enemy, battle, defense, retreat, soldier, guard, spy, sergeant, manor, chattel, captain, corporeal, etc.

Religion: ceremony, baptism, Bible, prayer, lesson, sermon, relic, miracle, disciple, abbot, clergy, sacrament, etc.

Titles and offices: duke, marquis, baron, constable, count, lieutenant, mayor, prince, viscount, vicar, dean, chancellor, countess, etc.

Architecture: cathedral, palace, mansion, chamber, ceiling, cellar, chimney, lattice, tower, porch, column, pillar, base, brick, storey, attic, tile, lintel, etc.

Titles and offices: duke, marquis, baron, constable, count, lieutenant, mayor, prince, viscount, vicar, dean, chancellor, countess, etc.

Art and Science: art, painting, sculpture, music, beauty, figure, image, tone, literature, poet, romance, story, chronicle, tragedy, prologue, preface, title, volume, chapter, paper, treatise, study, logic, geometry, grammar, noun, clause, gender, medicine, physician, surgeon, malady, pain, plague, anatomy, stomach, pulse, remedy, ointment, poison, alkali, sulphur, etc.

Social life and domestic economy: curtain, couch, chain, cushion, screen, lamp, lantern, blanket, towel, basin, parlor, wardrobe, closet, chess, recreation, leisure, fool, minstrel.

Natural Scenery: valley, mountain, river, torrent, fountain, gravel.

Colour: blue, brown, vermilion, scarlet, violet, crimson, mauve.

Jewelry: Jewel, ivory, enamel, brooch, turquoise, amethyst, topaz, garnet, ruby, emerald, pearl, diamond, crystal, coral, beryl.

Relationship: aunt, cousin, spouse, parent, uncle, nephew, niece.

Division of time: hour, minute, second.

Fashion: fashion, dress, habit, gown, robe, garment, cape, cloak, coat, frock, collar, veil, train, chemise, trousers, lace, embroidery, buckle, button, plume, kerchief, boots, galoshes, etc.

It is an interesting pattern about names of animals and after they were put in the table. Cow is native English but beef is French, similarly pig-pork, calf-veal, sheep-mutton, deer-venison, chicken and poultry. The main goal is to recognize the meaning of word components-fore, prefixes, suffixes. These make teachers concentrate on word that contain German and French roots on expanding student's receptive vocabulary.

Conclusively, the awareness of origins of words on the part of the learners helps EFL learners

to understand a new language. They can learn new words easily and fast using etymology through the comparison and contrast of each foreign word assimilated in the English language. In this way, the students create link between English words learned by themselves and other languages. The students understand the similarities between languages and they try to get the meaning of the words. This shows that the etymology has a positive impact on the EFL learners. Etymology also improves reading speed and comprehension level. It helps to enhance the stock of vocabulary that in due course, promotes elegance and sophistication in the usage of the target language at different levels. Moreover, it widens the horizon of thinking contributing to the assimilation of novel ideas belonging to alien cultures.

It is necessary to mention that although the introduction of the French words into English resulted in the extinction of too many Anglo-Saxon words, many of the English words continued to be used in the language side by side with their French equivalents. But, in the course of time some differences developed between the synonyms. The native words are always nearer to the nation's heart than the French words; they are more popular and fundamental, while the French words are often more formal, more polite, more refined and less emotional. For example, *amity* means formal friendly relationship especially between nations or states and thus lacks the warmth of *friendship*. *Help* expresses greater dependence and deeper need than *aid*.

The following table shows a list of some of the synonyms (**English words and French Loans**).

English words	French Loans	English words	French Loans
lonely	solitary	ask	Question
deep	profound	folk	People
darling	favorite	go on	Continue
fire	flame	fast	Firm
heartily	cordial	fight	Battle
happiness	felicity	rise	Mount
wish	desire	friendly	amicable

fear	terror	kingdom	Realm
time	Age	thief	Robber
might	power	hide	Conceal
begin	commence	weapons	Arms
feed	nourish	look for	Search
goodness	virtue	kingly	Royal
beg	Pray	sheep	Mutton
freedom	liberty	do	Perform

Thus, a comprehensive idea about the semantic implications of French loan words in English proves to be a very useful tool in enriching English vocabulary, especially among the adult non-native learners of English who need to conceptualize diverse shades of creation in a target language. Moreover, the strong cultural link existing between the French and the English arguably sets a precondition for English learners to have a deeper understanding of such linguistic overlaps.

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