ENGLISH WORDS AND PREFIXATION

This paper deals with something that is very important in our lives and is always present and ready to help but we usually don’t pay our attention to it. Those are words and what has already been said really happens, but if we try to identify the words from the point of view of any science and using the appropriate methods, we would discover different criteria and characteristics of words. From the point of view of linguistics, words are basic units to some degree, the smallest, and from the point of view of meaning, abstract. But basically, they are minimal free units with their structure and they express meaning. Words are parts of a language so the identification and the description of them cannot be done without a short review of what is language. The same happens with English words. In order to get a precise idea about English words, both diachronic and synchronic methods are applied. One of the biggest sources of producing new words in English, words formation process is involved, as an example; a process of prefixation is described. The main goal of the paper is to reveal some new ideas about English words and represent a new approach to words in the process of learning English as a foreign language.

Key words: language, words, word formation process, prefixation, synchrony and diachronic.

Language is taken for granted in everyday life and so the words that represent a certain language. It is probably so because either language in general or words that represent language are always present and exist around us no matter what we do. But both language and words represent a very important part of the human life because they are used to express our ideas, thoughts, wishes, emotions, etc. and to send them to other persons expecting a kind of reaction and in such a way producing communication between human beings. That is why language with its words is described in the simplest way as the basic means of communication. There are a lot of different identifications of what is language; i.e. Edward Sapir defines language as a method of communicating desires, ideas, etc. by means of using symbols among which words exist and Otto Jespersen says that language represents a set of human habits that express thoughts and feeling. Being present in everyday life, language is not only a linguistic matter. Other sciences try to define language from their point of view and by using their
methods and techniques. Pedagogy, for example, treats language as a medium for adopting knowledge or learning and an important part of human culture and education. It is obvious that language cannot exist without words and that is why, in order to understand words, let us mention some general remarks about language, or better to say – English language. The method of diachrony is not always necessary, or even popular in scientific researches, but considering words in English it would be applied in this paper for better understanding of their structure and meaning.

Nobody knows for sure how language began, or whether it began just once, or at number of different times and places. The only certain thing is that language is a living matter which constantly changes and develops. Since all linguistic efforts to reveal the origin of language remained useless, most of the linguists redirected their attention back to the individual language, trying to trace the signs of their origin and development as far back in the past as possible. It was thus discovered that certain groups of languages showed common origin. But since no written record is older than a thousand years, an evidence to prove the existence of a single parent or proto-languages to all the existing languages in the world may never be found.

Still, thanking to words basically, it can be concluded that there are related languages in the world originating from the same proto-language; i.e. the English word father corresponds to Gothic fadar, or Greek pater, Dutch wader, Sanskrit pitar-, old Irish athir and German bater; or English brother, German bruder, Greek phrater, Sanskrit bhratar-, old Slavic bratu and Irish brathair. These examples prove the hypothesis that related languages can be put into the same family. One of the world’s largest families to which most of the languages of Europe, America and part of Asia belong is known as Indo-European family. Vocabulary and grammar show a lot of similarities between the languages belonging to it.

It is believed that the proto-IE language was spoken five to six thousand years ago, but it is not certain who spoke it or where its speakers’ homeland was.

There are two languages that can serve as an example remaining old in grammar lexicon, and expressing the qualities of the proto-IE language. Those are Sanskrit and Lithuanian. On the other hand, only Basque, Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian and Turkish do not belong to this family. Besides the two classical antique languages, Greek and Latin, the IE family is divided into several sub-groups:

- Celtic – Welsh, Irish Gaelic, Breton and Scots Gaelic
- Germanic – English, German, Yiddish, Dutch, Flemish, Afrikaans, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and Icelandic
- Latin – Italian, Spanish, Catalanian, Portuguese, Galician, French, Provençal, Romansh, Romanian, Moldavian
- Slavic – Russian, Belarussian, Polish, Slovak, Czech, Serbian, Slovenian, Croatian, Macedonian, Bulgarian
- Baltic – Lithuanian, Latvian
- Hellenic – Greek
- Illyric – Albanian
- Thracian – Armenian
- Iranian – Farsi, Kurdish, Tadzhik, Pashto and Baluchi
Indic – Hindi, Urdu, Nepali, Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Bihari, Kashmiri, Punjabi, Gujarati, Sindhi, Marathi, Konkani, Sinhala, Maldibian and Romany.

Various nations that now speak different IE languages all over the world have lost memory of their former association, so the relationship between them had to be rediscovered in modern times by the use of comparative and contrastive linguistic methods.

In order to understand how English words are structured and how structure is connected with meaning and prove that words are important in English language, a short review of its development will be presented now. Special attention is paid to the morphological characteristics of each period because, as it is known, this language module primarily deals with words.

More recent and therefore more certain, there are the archaeological evidences proving that about 750 B.C. the Germanic people lived in Southern Scandinavia and along the coast of the North and Baltic Sea, spoke the common Germanic language which perhaps was still just a distant dialect of IE. Around the year 250 BC, these people were divided into fine groups and migrated into three directions that in the course of time caused the division of once uniformed Old Germanic into North, i.e. Danish, Norwegian, Faroese, Swedish and Icelandic; East, i.e. Gothic and West Germanic, i.e. English, Dutch, Afrikaans, German and Frisian. West-Germanic split into High and Low and Low Germanic further split into dialects including those of Angles, Saxons and Jutes, the tribes whose people moved into what is nowadays called England, winning over the Celts, although never completely. According to Venerable Bede, it happened in the year 449 AD, and it is at this time that we usually say the English language began.

How the structure and the meaning of words are important for understanding and studying English is shown even by the example where the word English or Welsh originate from. German invaders called the native Celts *wealas* (foreigners), so the name Welsh derived from it. The Celts called all invaders Saxons, and this term was used till the end of the sixth century, when the term Angli, Anglorum, Anglia started to be in use by Romans. Old English word Engle derived from them, while in the different texts Englisc, nowadays English, appeared. On the other hand the word England originates from Englaland – a land of Engles.

Although the evolution of English became a continuous process, three major periods of its historical development with a great impact to English words too can be distinguished.

Old English period (OE) 450 – 1150, also called Anglo-Saxon, was a period of full inflection. This language was rich with morphological characteristics. Words were spelled as they were pronounced and characterized by the inflectional forms to indicate grammatical characteristics of case, gender, number and comparison.

Middle English period (ME) 1150 – 1500 was the period of leved inflection, because some inflectional endings of OE were lost, and some remained. Nouns lost the case suffixes, and infinitival verbal ending –an was lost an replaced by “to” particle that was used in front of a verb base to indicate infinitive. Comparative and superlative degrees in adjectives and adverbs were marked by –er and –est, while most of the pronouns stayed unchanged.

Modern English period (ModE) 1500 – till now is known as a period of lost inflection. It is spoken since the Great Vowel Shift that was completed in 1550. It is divided into Early ModE or Elizabethan English and Late ModE nowadays.
As it can be seen, the reduction of the inflectional endings is the most significant characteristic of the development of English. There were, for example, between eight and twelve declinations in OE, the only surviving suffixes of which are –s1, –s2, and –s3 and the so-called irregular plural forms like ox – oxen (OE oxa – oxan), child – children (OE cild – cildru), sheep – sheep (OE sceap – sceap), goose – geese (OE gos – ges) and some others. The Saxon genitive case is the only surviving inflective case and OE grammatical gender is completely lost. Nowadays, grammatical characteristic of gender is related to the biological sex, so only living beings naturally characterized by female sex are feminine gender and by male sex masculine gender. Non-living objects that are not characterized by the biological sex are neuter.

The verbal inflectional system was increasingly simplified; the only surviving personal ending is the –s3. Almost the third of the so-called strong verbs forming the Preterit by mutation of the middle vowel like sing/sang became weak forming the Preterit by addition of the dental suffix t/d, like work/worked. Apart from the weak Preterit suffix –ed1, all other verbal endings disappeared including the infinitival suffix –an, the past participle prefix ge-, and present participle suffix –ende (the gerundial suffix –ing took over its function).

The process of reducing the inflectional system, that began at the end of the OE period and continued throughout the ME period, resulted in the comparative simplicity of the grammatical system of English, a bit alike to the Chinese one, but so exceptional among IE languages. The Slavic languages, for instance, preserved almost full IE inflectional system.

All these morphological changes are strictly the matter of the internal language history. English, however, was strongly affected by the external history, too. Some three hundred years after the West Germanic tribes had settled in England, there was another wave of invasion, this time by Scandinavians, or the “Danes” as they are often called, whose dialects belonged to the Northern group of Germanic languages. Since the large number of Danes also settled in England, many Scandinavian words entered English language. Some of them like sky, skin, skill, skirt, etc, can easily be identified as the naturalized foreigners, because the OE consonantal group sc was pronounced /sh/, and not /sk/, but for many others only a historian of language would dare say that they were not genuine English words, like get, give, die, take, call, sister; they, them, are, low, down, window; fellow, dirt, birth, guess, leg, trust, ill, want, weak, lift, raise, cow; bull, seat; kid, odd, etc.

Another historical event of great importance was the Norman Conquest in 1066. Although Normans originally came from Scandinavia just like the Danes they settled in the Valley of the lower Seine in 991, and within few generations completely abandoned their own language in favour of French. For several centuries after the battle of Hastings, Normans and French held the most important positions in England making thus French and Latin official language in the Island. Latin was spoken in Church, French among the nobles and English among common people. Although English came back as the official language at the end of the 14th century, it was not the same as the language of the days before the Conquest. It had undergone deep morphological and syntactic changes utterly changing its grammar – once synthetic it now became analytic. In fact, the Norman Conquest made it easier for the grammatical changes to go forward unchecked, but the vocabulary was affected directly and greatly – the number of French words that poured into English was unbelievably high. There is nothing comparable with it in the previous or subsequent history of language. Some of those words are: govern, crown, state, empire, reign, court, subject, public, liberty, office, no-
ble, prince, duke, count, baron, lesson, prayer, pension, servant, sir, madam, religion, dress, coat, fashion, dinner, taste, cream, etc.

This invasion of French words deeply affected the morphological system of English because these new words were accompanied by a large number of all kinds of affixes, and among other things, many verbs were back-formed (create, beg, complain, damn, execute, dine, tempt, confess, just) and converted (taste, dress, court, sugar, fashion, crown, pity) from the borrowed French words. In fact, this process of borrowing words has never stopped, since England (Great Britain) soon became a colonial power, with colonies spread all over the world, thus making a close contact with many different languages. Therefore almost every language in the world has at least one representative in the English vocabulary:

Italian – balcony, balloon, bandit, lagoon, lava, volcano, umbrella, carnival, etc.
Spanish – cockroach, mosquito, negro, canyon, tornado, guitar, embargo, etc.
German – waltz, zinc, poodle, kindergarten, poltergeist, leitmotiv, etc.
Dutch – boss, yacht, wagon, gin, deck, skipper, cookie, Santa Claus, etc.
Russian – sable, polka, pogrom, steppe, tundra, mammoth, vodka, glasnost, etc.
Persian – caravan, tiger, shawl, paradise, etc.
Hindustani – jungle, raja, bungalow, shampoo, etc.
Arabic – alcohol, alchemy, elixir, harem, cotton, coffee, hazard, giraffe, etc.
Turkish – jackal, tulip, turban, etc.
Hebrew – Satan, Jehovah, cherub, rabbi, jubilee, etc.
Japanese – soy, samurai, rickshaw, judo, kimono, kamikaze, etc.
Various Asiatic languages – taboo, tattoo, bamboo, tea, etc.
American Indian – tomato, potato, cocoa, chocolate, vanilla, skunk, etc.

About seventy percent of the present-day English vocabulary is not of Anglo-Saxon origin, which makes English the most cosmopolitan language in the world.

Another important linguistic consequence of building a colonial Empire lies in the fact that English sprung all over the planet – it is spoken by over 300 million people in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Britain itself, not to mention the former African and Asiatic colonies where it is used as the official language. Apart from the doubtless significance of British English (BE), the North American variant became increasingly important after the WW II. The difference between these two variants is not a large one, and is mainly reflected in pronunciation, spelling and lexis, for example BE railway, lorry, post, petrol, nappy, elevator, etc – AE railroad, truck, mail, gasoline, diaper, lift, etc.

BE is represented by Standard English or “good” English and it was established according to some geographical and historical coincidences being at first a local important language of the London – Central Midland Region. It became frequently used as it was at the right place at the right time. Thanking to political, economic, geographical or cultural reasons London was and is a political and commercial centre and geographically near Oxford and Cambridge. This variety of English is not perfect, but it is important in a social context, being without home and used in newspapers, e-mails, boards. It is put in a system recorded in grammar books, dictionaries and literature. Other non-standard varieties are also in use but they differ either in phonology and semantics or in grammar, for example Melbourne or
Manchester English. They are used internally and colloquially, and among them are Scottish, Welsh and Irish English as well.

In certain respects, AmE is closer to the English of Shakespeare time than Modern BE. Some “Americanisms” that the British criticise are actually original British expressions preserved in the colonies while lost at home, such as fall as a synonym for autumn, trash for rubbish, etc. The American variant served as the root of introducing many Native American words into the English language. Indian sounding names like Idaho and Iowa, words such as raccoon, tomato, canoe, savannah and hickory have native American roots while mustang, canyon, ranch are all of Spanish origin. To lesser extent French influence came mainly via Louisiana, and some West African words and words such as goober and gumbo, are West African borrowings first used in America by Slans.

The Canadian variant which used to be pretty similar to the variant of its metropolis is now completely Americanised and is nothing but the Northern form of General American – a rather archaic variant of BE. The Australian variant, the pronunciation of which is based partly on non-standard BE (cockney, Irish, etc) differs from BE mainly in the word stock – lexis (bush, kangaroo, boomerang, etc). The same is with the South African variant which had suffered strong influence of Dutch and Portuguese.

Large number of people, whose native language is English, along with its cosmopolitan vocabulary and simplicity of its grammar, make English almost perfect “world language”. It is spoken all over the world either as a first language, or as a second one. It is used for communication between scientist of different fields all over the world and it emerges in different technical fields such as computing vocabulary or airplane industry. There were attempts of making an artificial common language, but one natural language such as English with social, geographical, cultural and other important characteristics, and primarily because of its words, became common in the world.

Everything said above serves to prove the importance of words in English. In order to check how words of English are adopted a ten-year investigation was made among a second year students of English language and Literature Department attending the course in English Morphology with English as a second language. Most of the students at first take words for granted, but they are aware somehow of the importance of words in language. It is true that the concept of words is difficult to define because words can be treated from different points of view as lexical, grammatical, phonological units in linguistics, or even computational words in IT. David Crystal says: “We feed their obsession by publishing books of word games, putting word-puzzles in newspapers…and setting up web-sites…worldwide web was a misnomer. It should have been Word Wide Web”, adding that “We live in a Universe of words…” (The Crystal, page 3). According to some criteria, words are treated as the basic unit in some languages or the smallest unit of language with a fixed internal structure and as such they are minimal free units. Having some specific criteria, a word can be defined as and abstract unit, too. Nowadays a word is not treated as a morphological unit, but as a unit of syntax, and then it is a constituent at a phrase, clause and sentence level. Obviously, words combine a very large number of different characteristics and having their structure and expressing meanings, they relate meaning with structures and phonology. As such, they are the largest phonological and the smallest semantical units known as lexeme. Most English words are equal to lexemes. Lexemes, on the other hand, are treated as abstract units of the lexicon,
realised by word structures either in speech or writing. They are characterised by a semantic interpretation and express a cultural concept or can be called dictionary words as well. When students get all this information about the description of words they become aware of the importance of words in English and start to pay a severe attention to them.

During a course of time English words show a constant growth following the growth of society in general. So the primeval lexical stock is continuously fulfilled by a lot of lexical innovations forming the so-called secondary lexical stock. The units of this stock are products of the historical, i.e. diachronic and contemporary, i.e. synchronic development of language. Besides coinages, borrowings that have already been mentioned, one of the most productive processes of producing new words is known as a word-formation process. Different modules are involved in the process – lexicology, etymology and grammar – and different factors are involved in producing and adopting new words. Those are time, origin, reason, number, kind and form of elements, the word class of elements, the relationship between the elements, and finally the meaning of the elements and that of the composite.

Word-formation process is a large source of getting new words in English. That is why it is usually divided according to certain criteria, most often a frequency of forming new members into Major (affixation, compounding and conversion), and Minor, less productive process of Acronyms, Clipping, Blending, Back-Formation, Folk Etymology, Antonomasia, Reduplication and Echoism. New members are structured by using word-formation rules such as a rule according to which newly-formed words do not change category of word class.

Students usually adopt the structure of words in an easy way. Different combinations or matching of elements seem like a game to them. The problem of adopting the meaning of a structure – lexeme is furthermore complex and represent a long-lasting issue.

One of the most representative major processes is the process of affixation. The result of such a process is a structure called a complex word. It consists of the two elements – one expressing the basic meaning, known as a base or stem, and it can be represented either by a single word (consisting of only one morpheme), or a part of a word. Another important element is an affix, represented by a language unit called a morpheme. In English this is the smallest unit that expresses meaning. Thus many English newly-formed words are structured by a base and one or more affixes, for example uncover, beautifully, unproductive. Affixes are further divided according to the place they take toward the base into prefixes (affixes that precede the base, like mini-skirt) and suffixes (affixes that follow the base, like careful) circumfixes (enlighten) and infixes that usually do not exist in English. Affixes are attached to a base influencing the meaning of it and that is why they are called derivational.

A smaller number of affixes are prefixes, but the process of prefixation is the essential in derivation. Prefixes originate mostly from two sources. The native English prefixes like a-, be-, en-, um- developed in the OE period and belong to Anglo-Saxon source. The borrowed prefixes like multi- and poly- originate from classical languages Greek and Latin and they are known as neo-classical prefixes today. Before entering English, they were of three kinds: elements that had already been prefixes in classical languages before being introduced into English, like re-; Greek and Latin prepositions like circum- and hyper-; root of Greek and Latin words that entered English as a first part of a compound word, for example multi-, omni-, poly-, etc, loosing their independent lexemic status. Besides origin, prefixes can be divided into nominal, verbal, adjectival (based on word class ground), and according to the
type of modification represented by a prefix or how it influences the meaning of a base into negative, reversative, pejorative, etc. Prefixes be-, en-, a- can be exocentric prefixes, i.e. they do not express a relationship of modification.

There are some other characteristics of prefixes that are important for the process of prefixation. One and the same prefix can precede different word classes. By adding a prefix, a word does not change its class. They can be productive or non-productive. Prefixes usually carry the secondary, rather mild stress, and they are much more independent than suffixes, even leading to new words.

The basic rule of prefixation includes a base or stem that can be a primary lexeme, complex word or a compound word known as the determinatum, while only one prefix can precede the base being its determinant.

According to their meaning, prefixes can be divided into ten groups:
- Negative, mostly added to adjectives, but to nouns, verbs and adverbs as well, and one of the most productive is un- meaning not, like in unfair, unfit, unable, etc. The rest are in-, non-, dis-, a-, etc.
- Reversative prefixes un-, de-, dis-, combined mainly with verbs referring to undoing of a previous state, like undo, decontaminate, disarrange
- Pejorative prefixes mis- and mal-, meaning wrongly, while pseudo- and mock- refer to an imitation, like in misfire, maltreat, pseudo-friend, mock-childish.
- Repetitive prefix re- indicates the repetitive meaning, like in rediscove or reread, or sometimes doing something in a new way, like in reorganize, repack, etc.
- Causative prefix en- (or em-) is a conversional prefix influencing the change of a word class adjective into verb or noun into verb, like in enrich, and endanger, etc. The second causative productive prefix is be-, like in befriend, belittle, etc.
- Prefixes of degree/size/rank are arch-, co-, super-, mega-, hyper-, over-, out-, sub-, mini-, maxi-, mid-. Micro-, macro- and under-, like in underplay, macro-economics, minibus, etc.
- Prefixes of orientation/attitude are pro-, anti-, counter-, contra-, like in pro-American, anti-war, etc.
- Locative prefixes are fore-, inter-, sub-, super, trans-, like in transplant, subway, etc.
- Prefixes of time and order are fore-, past-, pre-, ex-, like in ex-president.
- Number prefixes are of Greek and Latin origin and they are combined relatively freely with nouns and adjectives. They are uni-, mono-, be-, di-, semi-, tre-, poly-, multi-, like in polysyllable, bilingual, etc.

Another possibility of representing prefixes is in alphabetic order. They are represented in this paper in an Appendix.

Conclusion

This paper deals with English words and one of the important processes of forming new words – prefixation. In order to identify words in English, a short review was written about language in general because it is usually taken for granted. This also happens with students of English as a second language. When they discover information about words, they adopt
the structure of words relatively easily, but a problem of adopting meaning or words is a linguist one. Words are treated differently according to different criteria but principally as the basic unit in language. A short historical review was done to explain how words developed in English, where they originate from and how they became members of the primary stock. They can also represent members of the secondary stock and one of the biggest sources of producing new words is a word-formation process consisting of major and minor sub-processes, according to the frequency of producing new members.

Finally, a process of prefixation is presented because it is one of the essential derivational processes. Further investigations about how they reflect Serbian language or how they are translated and used in Serbian can be proposed and will reveal the problem from another aspect helping students and all other learners adopt English language.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

РЕЧИ У ЕНГЛЕСКОМ ЈЕЗИКУ И ПРОЦЕС ПРЕФИКСАЦИЈЕ

Резиме

Језик као и речи се у свакодневном животу узимају здраво за готово. Међутим, и језик и речи играју важну улогу, па се идентификација и опис могу обавити са више аспеката. Да би се објасниле енглеске речи, њихова структура, функција и значење, потребно је укључити и синхрони и дијахрони метод. Зато овај рад садржи кратак опис развоја енглеских речи кроз три основна периода у развоју енглеског језика – старо-енглеском, средње-енглеском и модерном језику. Приказан је и низ извора за настанак речи, од латинског и француског, преко шпанског и неких афричких језика, до словенског. На идентификацију и опис енглеских речи утиче подела на више варијанти модерног енглеског језика. Истичу се две варијанте, стандардни енглески језик и амерички енглески, а једна од основних разлика је управо у речима и њиховом значењу. Један од основних морфолошких процеса који кроз речи повезује грамитички и семантички ниво анализе је процес грађења нових речи који је такође приказан у раду, а као пример представљен је процес префиксације. Основни циљ рада, поред описа енглеских речи, је и процес усвајања речи код студената енглеског језика као страног. Уочено је да они лако усвајају структуру речи док је процес усвајања значења речи дуготрајнији.

Кључне речи: језик, речи, процес грађења речи, префиксација