

# Latin and Greek Elements in English

## Lesson 12: Specialization and Generalization

- part of our continuing study of semantic change
- **SPECIALIZATION**: “the process by which the meaning of a word moves from a more general to a more specific sense,” e.g.
  - RADIC-: “root” > “one type of root, radish”
  - RAP-: “seize, pillage” > “seize a woman by force, rape”
  - VOT-: “wish, prayer” > “wish of a council, vote”
  - LIQUOR-: “fluid” > “alcoholic drink, liquor/liqueur”

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- **GENERALIZATION**: “the process by which the meaning of a word moves from a more specific to a more general sense,” e.g.
  - **TREMENDUS**: “dreadful, to be trembled at” > “awesome, huge, amazing, very good, tremendous”
  - **COMOEDIA**: “party-song, ribald verse” > “humorous drama, anything funny or comical”
  - **TRIUMPHUS**: “Roman parade in honor of a victorious general” > “military conquest, any sort of triumph”

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## Lesson 12: Specialization and Generalization

- specialization is much more common than generalization
- the reason for this is that English tends to use general Latin-based terms to cover specific things for which there is no existing word
  - cf. the generalizations cited above were already generalized in antiquity
- in general, language tends to move toward more specific terminology as new things come into being and new words are needed for those new things

# Latin and Greek Elements in English

## Lesson 13: Functional Change

- **FUNCTIONAL CHANGE**: “the process by which a word takes on a new usage as a different part of speech, without a change in form or the addition of a suffix”
  - vs. participles: verbs > adjectives, with the addition of a suffix
  - e.g. what’s in (or out): preposition > adjective
  - to out someone: preposition > verb
  - pros and cons: (Latin) prefix/preposition > noun
  - to while away the time: conjunction > verb
  - to firm up: adjective > verb
  - to black out: adjective > verb

# Latin and Greek Elements in English

## Lesson 13: Functional Change

- nouns functioning as adjectives
  - flower pot
  - noun suffix
  - elevator repairman
  - disk drive
  - party animal
  - n.b. the second/last noun is the essential thing
- this is a very common feature of Germanic languages:
  - e.g. National Laboratory Zero Power Plutonium Reactor Criticality Facility

# Latin and Greek Elements in English

## Lesson 13: Functional Change

- noun functioning as verbs
  - a very common feature of English
    - because we have very few verb-forming suffixes, either from Latin or our Germanic mother tongue
    - thus, put a noun into the verb slot of a sentence and it's a verb!
  - e.g., to film a movie
  - to telephone your friend
  - to bag your homework
  - to finger a criminal

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## Lesson 13: Functional Change

- noun functioning as verbs
  - to troop around
  - to panhandle
  - to skirt an issue
  - to cap the enrollment in a class

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## Lesson 13: Functional Change

- verbs functioning as noun
  - to have a go at something
  - to make a run for the border
  - to have a look-see
- not nearly as common a type of functional change in English as the other types
  - because many words enter English as nouns
  - thus, there's less pressure to create nouns
  - and with many noun-forming suffixes, it isn't necessary to create nouns from verbs through functional change