Lesson 5: Homonyms

- **HOMONYM**: “a word having the same pronunciation as another word but a different origin and meaning, and often also a different spelling”
  - in fact, the term encompasses TWO separate linguistic phenomena
    - homographs vs. homophones
  - **homographs**: words having the same spelling and sound, but a different meaning and origin, e.g.
    - rail:
      - “bar of wood”: Latin *regula* (“staff, rod”)
      - “utter abusive language”: Latin *rugire* (“bellow”)

Lesson 5: Homonyms

- **homographs**: words having the same spelling and sound, but a different meaning and origin, e.g.

  - **counter**:
    - “table in shop”: Latin *computare* ("count, add up")
    - “oppose(d)”: Latin *contra* ("against")

  - **tense**:
    - “nervous”: Latin *tensus* ("drawn tight")
    - “verb form indicating time”: Latin *tempus* ("time")

- n.b. all these homographs are the product of the chance conflation in spelling
Lesson 5: Homonyms

- **homophones**: words having the same sound, but a different spelling, meaning and origin
  
  - e.g., I/eye/aye; do/due; some/sum; rain/rein/reign; slay/sleigh; freeze/frieze; by/buy/bye; flea/flee; there/their
  - n.b. in certain regions, some homophones are not homophones
    - hoarse/horse: “hoar + s” vs. “hoss”
    - morning/mourning: “mahnin” vs. “more + ning”
    - for/four: “fer” vs. “foar”
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 6: Reduplication

• **REDUPLICATION**: “repetition of a sound or syllable within a word, often at the beginning of the word,” e.g. tintinnabulation
  – e.g. tom-tom, go-go, murmur, hush-hush, hubba-hubba, same-old same-old
  – also, chit-chat, fake-bake, ship-shape, monkey-junkie, bruhaha, clap-trap, helter-skelter, higgledy-piggledy
• often used in nonsense words today
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 6: Reduplication

• but in Indo-European, reduplication was used to indicate grammatical forms, e.g.
  – past-tense verb forms
    • Latin *pello* (“push”): *pepuli* (“pushed”)
    • also, *sto* (“stand”): *steti* (“stood”)
    • cf. memento/memory: IE *mer* (“ponder”)
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 6: Reduplication

• but in Indo-European, reduplication was used to indicate grammatical forms, e.g.
  – repetitive action
    • Greek base DIDAC- (“teach”)
      – cf. Latin DOC-
    • also, LAL(A)- (“talk, babble,” lit. “go lalala”)
      – lalageo: “chatter”
      – lalia: “babble”
      – lallai: “pebbles in a brook”
      – also, lallation: “childish utterance”
        • saying “l” for “r”; also called lambdalallia
      – glossolalia: ___________act of speaking in tongues_________?
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 6: Reduplication

• but in Indo-European, reduplication was used to indicate grammatical forms, e.g.
  – repetitive action
    • Latin SIST- (ST[A]-): “stop,” e.g. resist, desist
      – lit. “stand-stand,” i.e. “continually stand in place”
    • Greek CYCL-: “circle, wheel”
      – < IE *qweqwelo-
      – *qwelo-: “move around”
        • cf. colony: lit. people who have been “moved around”
      – -CL- = cognate with Germanic -(W)HL-: ___wheel___?
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 6: Reduplication

• in English, reduplication often represents silliness, e.g.
  – baby-talk: mama, papa, bye-bye, boo-boo, doo-doo, pee-pee, cutesy-wutesy, palsy-walsy, lullaby
  – nicknames: Mimi, Didi, Bibi, Gigi, Fifi, Lulu, Jojo, Bubba, John-John, Bam-Bam
• namby-pamby: nickname of Ambrose Phillips, an 18th-century poet who wrote very sentimental poetry
Lesson 6: Reduplication

• in English, reduplication can also have a derogatory sense, e.g.
  – fru-fru, bon-bon, chi-chi, pooh-pooh, dillydally, manly man
  – cf. Dadaism: art movement (Tristan Tsara, 1916-1922) which focused on formless expression and nihilistic satire
    • from dada, a meaningless word imitative of a child’s cry
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 6: Onomatopoeia

• **ONOMATOPOEIA**: “the formation of words through imitation of natural sounds associated with an object or action involved”
  
  – lit. “word-making”: ONOMATo- + POE- + -ia
  
  – cf. POE-try: “act of making (verse)”
  
  – e.g. snort, harumph, grunt, va-room, bonk, splat, squish, swish, snap, slurp, champ, chomp
  
  • cf. ralph: “In 3rd grade, I ralped all over Peggy Simmon’s new pencil case.” (Dave Barry)
  
  • also, animal sounds: moo, meow, woof, baa, caw, coo, buzz
  
  • with reduplication: hurdy-gurdy, ping-pong
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 6: Onomatopoeia

• onomatopoeia is hardly restricted to English, however
• it is seen in many languages, e.g. “bow-wow”
  – French: oua-oua
  – Italian: bu-bu
  – Korea: mung-mung
  – Japan: wan-wan
  – ancient Greek: how-how (Aristophanes, Wasps)
  – Latin: car-car
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 6: Onomatopoeia

• n.b. there is a tendency visible in English words to associate certain sounds with certain meanings, e.g.

  – **sp-** = wetness
    • splash, spray, spit, sprinkle, splatter, spatter, spill, spigot

  – **cr-** = break/buckle
    • crack, crumble, cramp, crash, cream (into), cringe, crinkle, crumple, crooked, crouch

  – **fl-** = quick/frantic movement
    • flail, flap, flip, flop, flicker, flounce, flee, fly, flutter, flash, fleet, flinch, flurry
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 6: Onomatopoeia

• “bow-wow” theory of language origin: all languages are in origin imitative
  – cf. bird-names: crow, whip-poor-will, bobwhite
  – Welsh “owl”: goody-hoo
• it is clear from this that some words are clearly onomatopoeic in origin, especially those belonging to certain classes (e.g. sp- words, names of birds)
  – but it’s a stretch to assert that ALL words/language derive from onomatopoeia
  – it’s better to say that onomatopoeia is and always has been a force in shaping language