Latin Lessons 12-13

The goals of Lessons 12 and 13 are to examine the linguistic processes called specialization, generalization and functional change. After that, in the audio counterpart of this video presentation, we'll examine the suffixes and bases introduced in these lessons. Don't forget to listen to that recording when you're done here.

To begin this video presentation we'll look at the linguistic principles of specialization and generalization, two more types of semantic change. Specialization is "the process by which the meaning of a word moves from a more general to a more specific sense." Here are some examples.

- The base RADIC- meant to the Romans "root," any root on any type of plant, but as time passed, it came in English to refer to the root of just one type of plant, the radish.
- Similarly, the base RAP- originally had a verb sense, "to seize, to pillage." You can still see that in our word "rapine" which connotes any sort of plundering. But a doublet of that word, "rape," later developed a more specific sense of sexual assault.
- VOT- in Latin means "a wish, prayer." It can connote any expression of desire, but our word "vote" which comes from this base has a narrower sense of "ballot," the decision or will of some group or electoral body.
- The base LIQUOR- originally referred to any fluid or liquid, but eventually developed a specialized sense, "alcoholic beverage," yeah, *that* kind of fluid. Specialization often shows what a society cares or worries about.

The opposite of specialization is generalization, "the process by which the meaning of a word moves from a more specific to a more general sense."

- The Latin word *tremendus* means "dreadful," anything "to be trembled at." The Romans used it most often when they referred to things that are noteworthy because they're frightening. In English, however, this word has taken on a much broader sense of "awesome, huge, amazing, very good," that is, "tremendous."
- The Greek word *comoedia* has also gained wider application over time. Originally it referred to a type of song (*-oedia*) sung at parties (*com-*). From denoting that one particular type of verse, the word eventually took on more general sense "a humorous performance," and later "anything funny," in other words, "comedy."
- A "triumph" was to the ancient Romans a particular type of parade, the celebration held for a victorious general. It was the highest honor any man could receive in the Roman Republic. Now "triumph" refers to any sort of grand victory, like earning an A in this class. All hail the victor!

These three words ─ tremendous, comedy and triumph ─ have all broadened their meaning through the process of generalization.

It's worth noting that specialization happens far more often than generalization. The reason for that is obvious. English uses Latin to create words to connote new things for which we need words, and those things tend to be some sort of innovation, often a new version of an old thing.

Conversely, generalizations are much less in demand. Indeed, all the generalized words I cited above ─ tremendous, comedy and triumph ─ had become generalized before they left antiquity, that is, long before they entered English. Usually we already have a word for a broad category like "tree." The greater need is for new words to denote specific kinds of trees ─ balsams, banyans, beeches ─ so we import words often from other languages and give them the specific meaning we require.

In the next lesson (Lesson 13) Mr. Ayers discusses another linguistic principle, functional change which is "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." Please note this does *not* include forms like participles, verbs which have been changed into adjectives through the addition of a suffix like *-ing* or *-ed*. Functional change occurs, for instance, when a preposition like "in" is used as an adjective, as when we talk about something being "in" or "out," meaning "in or out of fashion."

- The preposition "out" can also be used as a verb ─ you can "out" someone ─ that's another example of functional change.
- The phrase "pros and cons" is another example of functional change in which prefixes have been turned into nouns.
- If you "while" away time, you're treating a conjunction (while) as a verb.
- Along the same line, if you "firm" something up or "black" out, you're making an adjective into a verb.

In particular, nouns can often function as adjectives, for example:

- flower pot (flower is a noun but in this phrase it's an adjective telling you what kind of pot)
- noun suffix
- elevator repairman
- disk drive (does anyone still use those?)
- party animal (I'm pretty sure those still exist).

Note that the second noun in the phrase is the noun. The first is the adjective. Turn them around and you create a very different thing. For instance, a party animal is an animal that likes parties. An animal party may include party animals, but it's now the party, not the animal. This tendency to pile up nouns, all of which are really adjectives except the last one, is a feature English shares with its Germanic cousins. For instance, both German and English do this a lot. Consider this name: the National Laboratory Zero Power Plutonium Reactor Criticality Facility. Well, it's a facility. I can see that. Beyond facility, I have really no idea what's going on here. Actually sounds kinda scary.

English exploits another common type of functional change in which nouns serve as verbs. This happens a lot because we have relatively few verb-forming suffixes of either classical or Germanic origin. So if you want to make new verbs, the easiest way is just to put a noun in the verb slot of a sentence, and voila! Verb! Hence,

- you "film" a movie ─"film" is originally a noun until you use it as a verb

- or "telephone" your friend
- "bag" your homework (don't!)
- "finger" a criminal
- "troop" around
- "panhandle"
- "skirt" an issue
- and "cap" the enrollment in a class.

All nouns of these are serving as verbs. They're "verbing," so to speak. [Let's hope that example of functional change doesn't catch on.]

Likewise, verbs can play at being nouns:

- you can have a "go" at something
- or make a "run" for the border
- or just to have a "look-see" (fascinating double verb-noun)

This type of functional change is far less frequent in English, because many words enter the language as nouns so there's no need to change their function. Also, we have rafts of noun-forming suffixes which preempt the need to alter a word's part of speech without changing its form.

And that's it for the linguistic principles in these lessons, and for this video presentation. Be sure to listen to the accompanying audio presentation about the suffixes and bases introduced in Lessons 12 and 13 of Ayers' textbook. You'll find a link to that audio on the course web site.

Happy etymologizing!

ASSIGNMENT

This audio presentation covers the exercises in Lessons 12 and 13. Please start by turning to page 84 of your textbook.

The first suffix in Lesson 12 is *-itious*, a +1 suffix meaning "tending to, characterized by." Please add another meaning "having the nature of." The next suffix, *-id*, is another +1. It's cognate with the English suffix *-y*, as in "rainy." The last suffix in this lesson, *-ulous*, is a variant of a suffix you know already, *-ous*, but note that, while *-ous* is +2 ("full of"), *-ulous* is only +1. We'll learn later that *-ul-* is a suffix that means "little," so that's, I guess, why it's "a little" less than "full of." Just kidding, but if that helps you learn it, good!

Moving on to the bases in this lesson, here is another very important pair: CAP- and FAC-. Put double stars next to both. You'll see them a lot. CEIV-, the French variant of the CAP- base, is largely responsible for the English habit of putting "i before e except after c." Do you know the rest of the poem? "Except when it's /a/ as in neighbor and weigh." Don't ask me to explain this weird convention of spelling. I can't. It's inexplicable. It's French.

To FAC-, FIC-, FACT-, FECT-, please add the form FICT- which actually comes from a different Latin verb meaning "form, invent." But both the meaning and form of FICT- is so close to FACT- it's hard to see the difference when you're looking only at derivatives, so let's just put these two bases together and make them one.

Finally, to FLU-, FLUX-, FLUV-, FLUORO- , let's add another form FLUCT- which gives us the word "fluctuate."

That's it for Lesson 12. Now let's look at Lesson 13. Please turn to page 87 where Mr. Ayers provides another set of Latin adjective-forming suffixes, the last ones we'll encounter in the Latin part of this book. The first, -*ive*, a +1 suffix, is very common. Put two stars by this one, too. Note that, when it's followed by another suffix, the silent -e on the end disappears so you should add the form -*iv*- (i.e. no -e). Besides "tending to" and "inclined to," there are some other helpful meanings you may want to include: "using" (as in "sensitive"), "by reason of" ("inductive"), and "having to do with" ("interrogative").

The other suffixes in this lesson are also +1's. To -*ory* you might add the meanings "containing/expressing" (for example, "accusatory"), "involving" ("compulsory"), and "serving to" ("compensatory").

The first base in this lesson (toward the bottom of the page), CERN-, CRET-, CERT-, meaning "separate, distinguish," is cognate with another base we'll study in Lesson 16, CRESC-, CRET-, meaning "grow." The reason these two bases share the form CRET- is that they come from the same Latin verb, one that means "grow, increase, become large." When things start to "grow," they "separate" from where they started ─ a plant "grows" away from the ground where its seed was sown so the plant and the ground "separate" ─ that's how these two related but distinct meanings arose. Therefore, if you see CRET-, you'll ultimately have to choose between "grow" and "separate." Usually the correct sense is clear from context, but if you choose the lesser option, you won't lose points in this class. Following the rules will always get you full credit.

Here's a helpful spelling tip related to this base. Ever heard the word "discrete"? It means "separate," as in discrete problems, problems which may look connected but they're actually not. When "discrete" means "separate," it's spelled in such a way that the e's are separated by the t: D-I-S-C-R-E-T-E. But when it's spelled with the e's together ─ D-I-S-C-R-E-E-T ─ it means something completely different: "modest, prudent, careful." There the -e's are hidden "discreetly" inside the word. Now you'll never be so indiscreet as to confuse the spelling of these two, very discrete words.

The base FUND-, FUS-, FOUND- originally meant "pour" but came to denote the bottom of something because that's where things go when they're poured. So a "foundry" is a place where metal is heated up to the point where it melts and can be "poured," usually into molds which shape it. The same is true of the word "foundation."

To end this presentation, let's add one more variant of the last base on page 88, TORT-. The present-tense form of this Latin verb root, TORQU-, also gives us derivatives like the word "torque," the force that produces a twisting motion on something. Please add that form.

And that's it for the audio presentation about Lessons 12 and 13. Remember to study and memorize all the suffixes and bases in these lessons, even if I didn't comment on them here. The list of those is getting rather long, isn't it? Making it habit to do the online drills should help you commit them to memory. And don't forget: doing any drill before its due date will also win you bonus credit toward your final grade. Falling behind schedule lies at the heart of most problems students have with this class. Overcoming the impulse to procrastinate, not the number of things you need to memorize, is in all reality your biggest enemy here. Go, defeat that foe and make your …

Etymologizing happy!