Latin Lessons 5 and 6

The goals of Lessons 5 and 6 are threefold: to look into a few more linguistic processes ─ back formation, apheresis and aphesis ─ to finish our study of Latin prefixes and to examine how some Latinate words in English contain a combination of bases. In this video presentation we'll address only one of those goals, the first, the linguistic processes. In the audio presentation accompanying this video, we'll look at the other two goals, the prefixes introduced in Lesson 5 and in Lesson 6 how bases can be combined. And as always I'll add a few notes about some of the forms to be memorized here. When we're done here, please don't forget to listen to the accompanying audio presentation for these lessons.

The theme of the first part of Lesson 5 is the two ways in which shorter words can be formed from longer words: back formation and apheresis (sometimes called aphesis). First, back formation which is "the creation of simpler forms from more complex forms, usually by the removal of an affix." For example, the verb "to reune" meaning "to get together at a reunion" was formed by the removal of the suffix *-ion* from the noun "reunion." Likewise, the verb "surveil" was created by taking the suffix *-ance* off the end of the noun "surveillance." Can you guess what it means? That's right: "to conduct surveillance, to observe (usually in some sort of sneaky fashion)." One more example, "lase" or "lasing" is a word formed by removing the purported suffix *-er* from "laser." As you well know from our study of acronyms. the *-er* on the end of "laser" is not actually a suffix but the product of an acronym formed from "Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation." But it sure does sound like lasers lase, doesn't it? So back formations don't have to be based on real etymology, only the perception of it.

Let's look at some examples of back formations, some new, some very old. Please turn to Exercise V on page 51 of Ayers' textbook. There, number 1 is "spectate." That's a back formation of what word? Obviously, the noun spectator: spectators, it's safe to assume, spectate. What about number 2, emote? What does that back formation come from? Of course, emotion. When you have an emotion, you're emoting. Duh.

Do you see the principle? Good! Then please pause this presentation and look over the rest of the examples on this page. Can you see the longer word these back formations come from? If not, look the word up in the dictionary and see if you can find the answer for yourself. When you're done, start the presentation again and I'll give you the answers.

Okay, got them all? "Execute" comes from … "execution." "Scavenge" comes from "scavenger," "enthuse" from "enthusiasm," "vaccinate" from "vaccination." But what about "pea," that little round vegetable which your mother made you eat up all of before you could leave the dinner table? Did you look it up? "Pea" comes from "pease" which was the original term for this food item but there was an obvious problem. Pease sounds plural. It seems so wrong to say "Harvey, you finish every last pease on that plate, or I'll call your father!" "Every pease"? Please. So our ancestors dropped the -se and created the back formation "pea": one pea, two peas, and no pease with an -e on the end anymore! Language has to make sense. If it doesn't, we fix it, even when it really doesn't need fixing.

What about the rest? “Edit” comes from “editor” or “edition,” “surreal” from “surrealism” ─ the art movement preceded the adjective ─ and finally, “preempt” is a back formation of “preemption.”

Get it? Can you identify a likely back formation if you see one? That’s all you’ll have to do on tests and quizzes in this course: match three back formations to the term itself. Think you can do that? Good!

The next type of word shortening is called “apheresis,” that is, “the elimination of the first letter or syllable of a word.” It’s a Greek-based term that means literally “removal.” For instance, if you “paper” the house, in other words, put up wallpaper, you’ve used a word that was created through apheresis.

There’s a subtype of apheresis called “aphesis,” which is “the loss of a *short, unaccented* first syllable of a word.” Examples include “rise” which comes from “arise,” “bide” which comes from “abide,” and “light” (in the sense of “land on, step down”) which is the aphetic form of “alight,” as in the biblical passage “He *lighted* down from his chariot” or Shakespeare’s lines “If you deny it, let the danger *light* / Upon your charter and your city’s freedom.” Shylock’s threat! Very scary. Isn’t Shakespeare great?

Let’s look at few more examples of apheresis in Ayers’ textbook. Please go to page 51 again and look at exercise VI ─ it’s at the bottom of the page ─ starting with number 1, “lone.” That’s the product of apheresis (or aphesis ─ we’re going to treat the terms like they’re interchangeable) of what word? “Lone” comes from “alone.” What about number 2, “mend”? It comes from “amend” (or “emend”). What about number 3, “state”? It comes from “estate.” The next two are really complicated. “Auger” which is a type of drill comes from “nauger,” a now obsolete word formed from two other words: “nave,” that is, the center of a wheel, plus -gar which means “spear.” So originally a “nauger” was “nave-spear.” That’s a funny way of saying but not entirely an inaccurate description of what we would call an “axle.” And here comes the apheresis: because the word was later misunderstood as not “a nauger” but “an auger,” the initial n- dropped off “nauger,” resulting in the aphetic form “auger.”

Like “a nauger,” “umpire” went through much the same process. Originally it was “non-per,” meaning “not a peer, not of the same rank,” the implication being that the people who judge something should be of a different standing from those about whom they are making decisions. In other words, they should be higher-class. Ultimately, a “non-peer” (or -per) was misconstrued as “an onpeer (i.e. umpire),” and the initial n- was lost, just as with “auger.”

And finally “spite” is the aphetic form of … “despite.” Simple enough! Is the process of apheresis clear to you? Look for short words created by dropping an initial syllable or letter off a longer word.

But words can be shortened by at least two other means: syncope and apocope. Let’s look at those briefly, too. Syncope is “the loss of a syllable in the middle of a word,” such as “curtsy” from “courtesy,” or “fortnight” from “fourteen(th) night,” “proctor” from “procurator,” and “lord” from “loaf-ward,” which is exactly what it sounds like, “the ward or guardian of the loaf,”

as in a “loaf of bread.” A lord originally protected the food source of his people. His “lady” was originally the “loaf-dig” ─ “dig” here means “knead,” as in kneading dough ─ the woman who made the bread by kneading it. In other words, the lady “digs” the dough (kneads it) and the lord “wards” it (guards it). Food was obviously a major source of concern in the Middle Ages.

Some words exhibit syncope in their pronunciation but not their spelling, for instance, “every” which is spelled as if it has three syllables ─ ev/er/y ─ but it’s spoken most often with only two: ev/ry. Another example is “general,” spelled with two e’s but generally pronounced as if it has only one. Also, “catholic” versus “cath-o-lic,” and “interesting” which is usually not “int-er-esting.”

Closely related to syncope is another type of -cope, apocope, “the loss of a syllable at the end of a word.” A good example is “good-bye” from “god be with thee,” where the “with thee” is lost. Another example is its opposite, “hello,” from “whole be thou,” “whole” here in the archaic sense of “healthy.” Compare the word “wholesome.” You’re not responsible for the terms syncope and apocope. Although they’re important principles of language change, they don’t affect English words derived from Latin and Greek all that often, so for the purposes of this class they’re not worth learning. I introduce them only to show you how often and in how many different ways we shorten our words. Shorter is better, isn’t it?

And that’s it for the video presentation for Latin Lessons 5 and 6. Next you should listen to the audio presentation on the prefixes and bases in these lessons. You’ll find a link to that audio presentation on the course web site. Happy etymologizing!

ASSIGNMENT

This is the audio presentation covering the assignments in Latin Lessons 5 and 6. Please open your textbook to page 48 and let’s look at the last of the Latin prefixes we’ll study in this course. As always I’ll comment on some of the forms but only those I need to say something about. Nevertheless, you must memorize all the forms in the assignments for Lessons 5 and 6.

On page 48, notice that the prefixes *pre-* and *pro-* are essentially vowel grades of the same form, both meaning “forth.” Please add that definition (“forth”) to each of these prefixes. *Pro-*, however, carries some connotations *pre-* does not, in particular, the sense of “for” as in “in behalf of, in favor of.” Conversely, *pre-* more often connotes time, as in “precede,” whereas *pro-* tends to denote “forward” in space, as in “proceed.”

When the prefixes *re-* and *se-* are attached directly to a base which begins with a vowel, they often append the letter *-d-* to buffer the vowels, as is seen in our Latin derivatives “redemption” and “sedition.” It’s the same principle we employ when we add an -n to “a” producing “an” if the next word begins with a vowel, as in “an elephant, an apple.”

Further down the list of prefixes on page 48, notice that the prefix *sub-* is a very common one so put a star by it. Note also that it often assimilates. It can show up as *sus-*, *suc-*, *suf-*, *sug-*, *sum-*, *sup-* and *sur-*, depending, of course, on the letter following it. Big assimilator here!

Moving on down the list, be careful to note that *super-* has a French-derived variant *sur-* seen in words like "surcharge, surmount, surprise."

And finally, *trans* can lose its final *-s* or both its *-n-* and its *-s-*, producing the variants *tran-* and *tra-*.

Now let's look briefly at some of the bases in Lesson 5, starting on page 49.

To CLUD-/CLUS-/CLOS-, add another variant CLAUS- which appears in our word "clause," literally a sentence part which is "shut" off grammatically from the rest of the sentence.

The base PEND-/PENS- got its sense of "pay" from the ancient custom of measuring payment with balances where one commodity was "weighed" against another by "hanging" them in scales. Thus, "to hang" came to mean also "to weigh," and from that developed the sense "to pay." From that "pay" sense we get words like "pension, expense."

That's all I have to add to this set of bases. Be sure to commit the rest to memory.

Now's let move on Lesson 6 which begins on page 52, where Mr. Ayers discusses the combination of bases within a single word. Note that Latin uses a combining vowel between bases to buffer them and ensure that consonants don't collide which can't be pronounced together. Taking the base OMN-, for instance, and putting it in front of the base POT- without an interceding vowel creates the impossible-to-say OMNPOT-. But inserting an -i- combining vowel resolves the problem: OMNi-POT as in "omnipotent." While Latin prefers -i-, it uses a wide variety of combining vowels: -u- as seen in "quadruped" (a four-footed creature) or -a- in "nonagenarian" (a person in their nineties). Not always is a combining vowel used, however, especially when the consonants which are colliding can easily be spoken together. Mr. Ayers provides a two good examples of this at the bottom of the page: "facsimile" and "nomenclature."

Finally, the bases in this lesson on page 53 focus on numbers and enumeration. Note that SEMI- most often denotes "every half," as in "semiannual" meaning "every half year," that is, every six months. Its opposite is BI- which means "every two," as in "biennial" ("every two years," i.e. every twenty-four months).

One very important thing to note here is that all these forms are BASES, not prefixes! It's a very easy mistake to take them as prefixes since many of them are small and they're often attached to the front of other bases, but since these number bases can stand on their own as the foundation of a word (unity, duet, octave) ─ and prefixes cannot do that! ─ they must be categorized and treated as bases. Be careful! Always write the forms on this page in capital letters. Write this right now in your notes: numbers are bases!

Besides the formal list of bases in this assignment, Mr. Ayers adds some others in a paragraph below the list. He says you don't need to learn them because they appear so rarely. However, the words they appear in often show up on tests like the GRE and LSAT. So I disagree with Mr. Ayers. I think you *should* learn them. I'm adding them to your list of forms to memorize. Note especially SESQUI- which means "one and a half," as seen in the word "sesquicentennial" which

is used to describe “a period of one hundred and fifty years.” A “sesquicentennial” celebration, for instance, occurs after something’s been around for a century and a half.

And I disagree again with Mr. Ayers (at the bottom of page 55) ─ and please note that this time I’m lightening your memorization load ─ where he talks about the utility of adding *-ple* as a suffix to the list of things you need to learn. Any *-ple* or *-plet* you encounter after a number base you can easily diagnose as the base PLE- (“fill, full”) which you learned in Lesson 5. The jump from “fill” to “-fold” is not that hard to make. So strike the suffix *-ple* from your to-learn list.

Nor do I think this is the class in which you should learn Roman numerals which Mr. Ayers discusses on page 54. If you don’t know how to count like a Roman, well, you ought to learn that someday, but not here or now. Roman numerals still have many applications in modern society, especially in the inscriptions on buildings and in writing the date on which something happened, but they’re remarkably useless for the most important application of numbers today, math. Try doing any math problem in Roman numerals and you’ll instantly see why the Romans didn’t invent calculus, even though “calculus” is a Latin word.

And that’s it for Latin Lessons 5 and 6. Be sure to look over the diathesis (outline) of Quiz 1 as you prepare the first assessment in this class. You’ll find a link to that diathesis on the syllabus.

Happy etymologizing, or if you can’t be happy about it, then just study hard!