Latin Lesson 7

The goals of Lesson 7 are to look at the concept of hybrids ─ foul and terrible things ─ and study the bases in this lesson. Since we're examining only one lesson here, this will be among the shorter presentations in this class. I can feel your disappointment from here. When you've finished watching this remarkably succinct video presentation, don't forget to indulge in its somewhat more dilatory audio counterpart which you'll find on the course web site.

Hybrids are "words composed of elements drawn from different languages." They are horrendous, misshapen, misconstrued monstrosities betraying the ignorance and tastelessness of their maladjusted creators. I don't like them, or the words they create. There's never a need for hybrids and always a better, saner, finer-sounding option to be found *within* a language system. Hybrids are the love-children of Franglish speakers and Gratin lovers. Away from my doorstep, you miscegenist miscreants!

But the fact is English is replete with such word-mutts, for instance: off-color (English/Latin), superman (Latin/English), ultrafast (Latin/English again), teledata (Gratin), audiophile (Latreek), microprocessor (Gratin with a side of prefix). And literally millions more! Why are there so many hybrids, you ask? I'll answer that question after you answer mine: why are there so many morons, pretentious people who want to sound suave and worldly, when in fact they've only ever left the city they were born in once and that was to go to the next county.

Technobabble, a horrible hybrid for a horrible concept, is the sewer where this subspecies likes to breed. Here's a joke ad I found for skiing equipment, mocking the tendency to cobble together complex-sounding forms and spawn mongrel jargon: high-tech, positac, hydro-rebound, multi-layered, and all sorts of other eso-speak. Every time I hear this sort of thing, I know I got off on the wrong planet. Our alien overlords can't arrive too soon.

Want to experience some more hybrids? Put on your linguistic hazmat suit and go to page 60, exercise 3, in Ayers' textbook. It's like misfit day at the word toy factory: television (Gratin), anteroom (Latinglish), megaton (Greeglish), ill-tempered (Old Norse-glish), and even automobile (Gratin Gratin everywhere, but not a thought to think). The list goes on and on. Need more examples? Just open your ears and eyes and welcome the motley world in. But before you try to come into my space again, decontaminate yourself. Understand what you're saying and where it comes from. As your mother said, don't just pick something off the floor and put it in your mouth. Hybrids are low-bred. Be better than that!

And that's the end of this blissfully brief video presentation about the linguistic principles covered in Lesson 7 of Ayers' textbook. Next please listen to the audio presentation covering the assignments in this lesson, in particular, the bases you're asked to memorize there. You'll find a link to that audio presentation on the course web site.

Happy etymologizing!

ASSIGNMENT

This audio presentation covers the exercises in Lesson 7 of your textbook. Please go to page 58, where Mr. Ayers lists some of the most important bases we'll study in this section of the class. The effort you expend memorizing these will be well worth it, considering how often you'll see these bases in English derivatives.

The first base ANIM- is tied to two different Latin words, one, *animus*, meaning "mind, feeling," basically the driving force that makes your brain work. The other, *anima*, means "breath, life," the living force inside you. Lose your *anima*; you die. Lose your *animus* and you only pass out. These two words lost their distinction when they entered English in Latin-based derivatives, resulting in two groups of words with different meanings. Some connote life: animal, animate, reanimate. These come from *anima* ("life"), and they constitute the majority of derivatives. Others connote some sort of mental process, often hostility or anger: animus, animosity, animadversion ("harsh criticism"). These come from *animus* ("mind").

Note that the next base ANN(U)- has a vowel-gradated form ENNI- used when a prefix or another base is attached to the front of the word, for example, "quadrennial." Can you figure out what "quadrennial" means? That's right, "happening every four years," like US presidential elections.

The base, BENE-, opens up an issue we need to address, that some adjectives and their base forms can appear in different degrees. Degree is the technical term for what adjectives do when they increase in intensity, moving from positive to comparative to superlative, for instance, "big, bigger, biggest." "Big" is the positive degree, "bigger" the comparative, and "biggest" the superlative. Some adjectives, for the most part very common ones which are thus more likely to produce derivatives, have irregular degree forms, such as the English triad "good, better, best." The Latin forms of the same adjectives are just as irregular as their counterparts in English. The Latin base for "good, well" is BON-/BENE-. Its comparative counterpart ("better") in Latin is MEL(IOR)-. This base gives us words like "ameliorate," which means "to make something better." Please add MEL(IOR)- to your list of bases to memorize. The Latin base which represents the superlative degree form "best" is OPTIM-. You'll find that later down the list of bases on this page. You should learn these three bases together as a group ─ BON-/BENE-, MEL(IOR)-, OPTIM- ─ because, different as they look, they actually belong to one adjective-base system.

Further down this list of bases there's another adjective which has irregular degree forms, MAGN- meaning "great, large." Its comparative "greater" is in Latin MAJOR- (sometimes MAJUS- or just MAJ-) from which we get words like "major, majesty, majuscule (a term for capital letters)." The Latin superlative form for this adjective is MAXIM-. It means "greatest" and gives us words like "maxim, maximum, maximize." Please learn all these forms: MAGN-, MAJOR- (and its variants), and MAXIM-.

Another example of an adjective with irregular degrees is MAL(E)- meaning "bad." Just like our adjective triad which goes "bad, worse, worst," ─ I think we can all agree that's fairly irregular! ─ the Latin equivalent goes MAL(E)-, PEJOR- ("worse"), PESSIM- ("worst"). PESSIM- gives us words like "pessimist, pessimistic"; PEJOR- words like "pejorative" (a term for harsh or negative language). Please commit all these to memory too.

And here's one more example of irregular degrees: the Latin base MULT- ("many") and its "multiple" derivatives; its comparative PLUS-/PLUR-, meaning "more" ─ from this we get words like "plus, plural, and the motto *e pluribus unum* (lit. 'from more, one,' that is, from a plurality (we have built) a singularity)" ─ and finally the superlative PLURIM- ("most"). For some reason, however, PLURIM- rendered no significant English derivatives so you don't have to learn it. But please do add PLUS-/PLUR- ("more"), the comparative of MULT-, to the bases on this list you are memorizing.

Returning now to the point on this list where we left off, please go back up to CUR-, meaning "cure, care," and note that it's identical in form to one of the variants of the base that means "run." We studied that run-base in Lesson 5. So if you see the base CUR- in a word, you'll just have to guess from context whether it means "care" or "run." Know that if you guess wrong, I won't take points off. Any time you follow the rules here, whether or not you end up with the right answer, by doing what you should do you will always win full credit. The process of etymologizing words properly is what you're learning here and ninety-nine times out of a hundred it will lead you to the right answer. If for some reason it doesn't, that's not your fault. Following the rules is what this class is about, not how well you guess. Fair? So look at the CUR- word carefully and see if there's a natural "running" sense to it: current (as in running water) or cursive (as in a running or quick form of handwriting). If so, the base is probably the run-variant of CUR-. The converse applies to words that have a caring or curing sense, like "curative" or "accurate" (literally, "handled carefully").

The next bases I want to call to your attention are FER- and LAT-, both meaning "bear, carry." Much as these two bases look different, they come from the same Latin verb, one verb composed of two different bases like our verb "go," the past tense of which, "went," once belonged to another verb "wend," now used only in phrases like "to wend one's way home." The combination of FER- and LAT- inside one base system shows how English derivatives like "refer" and "relate" are actually more closely related than they look. Both mean at heart "bear back." Sometimes when one of these variants is used, it's hard to see what a word means, such as "oblation," but if you substitute the other variant, the meaning often comes into focus. Take the LAT- out of oblation and replace it with FER- ─ and add a little assimilation; the b in ob- will change to -f in front of FER- ─ and oblat- turns into offer-. Oblations are offerings. So if you are stumped by some word with FER- or LAT- in it, try the trick of replacing the base with its counterpart and see if you don't get an easier word to define.

Finally, the last base on this list, PLIC-/PLEX-/PLY-, is in fact a conflation of two different Latin verbs. One means "entwine, weave" and gives us words like "complicate, implicate"; and the other means "fold" and gives us derivatives such as "implicit, complex, imply, multiply." But the two bases looked so alike that in later Latin they became confused, so Mr. Ayers is right to combine them and call them one base. I say this only to explain why "fold" and "interweave," which are really not the same processes at all, are all "tangled" up here in one base.

And that's it! Please give these bases some time in your mental memorization cooker. You'll see them quite often.

Happy Etymologizing!