

WORD MEANING IN DAILY USE

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses, primarily, on the various aspects of word-meanings in daily life. It studies how narrowed or contraction of meaning is made specific from general and expansion of meaning is made general from specific. At times, meaning is elevated and sometimes meaning is degenerated. Hence meaning is evolved into a new meaning.

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Introduction

Word are taken, normally, from one language by another without Semantic Change, but off and on there may be some variations among them. A word reveals its different meanings in different situation and environment. For example, 'Glass indicates its original form or original meaning 'glass' but its new form occurs in a pot of drinking water. Borrowed word occurs into a new meaning by the effect of local culture. Normally Semantic change occurs in three situations.

Contraction or Narrowing of Meaning

When the meaning of a word is narrowed and made specific from general, we have an example of contraction of meaning. "For the most part the meanings of words, at first general and perhaps vague, tend to become more and more specific", says Gray.

There may be the following stages of contraction:

- **First Stage: Too much Contraction of Meaning**

In this category that words can be taken which, having left its expansive meanings, occur in some definite and contracted meanings. For instances, 'Station' may be taken. It indicates a place where a service is organised and provided : a 'bus/po'lice'/broadcasting, 'radar/fire/' but it is contracted in 'Rly. Station'.

In this category, Congress, league, motor, cycle, etc., words can also be taken:

- **Congress:** In English, it means a meeting for discussion series of meetings, of representatives (of societies, etc.): a medical congress, the Church congress, congress, law-making body, e.g. of U.S.; political party in India, Congress-man, Congress woman, member of U.S. Congress. Now it is used for 'National Congress' of politicians. .
- **League:** Agreement made between persons, groups or nations for their common welfare, e.g. to work for peace; the parties that make such, an agreement; the league of nations; group of sports clubs or teams playing matches among themselves : group of football matches. Now it is used for a very big institution.
- **Motor:** A device which imparts or utilizes power to produce motion. But now it indicates run by motor - 'car', 'cycle' or 'lorry'.
- **Cycle:** Series of events taking place in a regularly repeated order: the series of the seasons; complete set or series : a song series, the series of King Arthur and his Knights; bicycle or motor-cycle. But now it is used for bicycle or motor.

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- **Second Stage: Contraction of meaning in various fields**

In this category, the word 'Machine' may be taken. Its normal meaning is an appliance or mechanical device with parts working together to apply power, often steam or electric power, but now it is contracted in most used machine-form, for instance:

Machine Age, type-writer machine, electro-stat machine, machine-gun, sewing and printing machine, etc.

- **Third stage of contraction**

Such words give up their original meanings and tend to specific meanings and meanings occur in contraction. For instance, 'Gas' may be cited:

- **Gas:** It is a kind of air-like substance which is used for several works. It is used for lighting and called 'gas-light'. It is also used for cooking and heating and called gas cooker and heater respectively.

Similarly 'treasury - तिजोरी' is a place or house where treasure is stored, but it is contracted into steel or wooden box or almirah, where money and ornaments are kept.

- **Fourth stage of contraction**

The words of this category seem to developing and there after the original meaning is contracted in some definite boundary. Though its original meaning has also been used along-with its contracted meaning. For instance, 'glass' may be taken :

- **Glass:** It is hard, brittle substance, usually transparent. How it is used for glass-ware, glass-blower, glass-house, glass-window, glass-paper, glass-wool, mirror-looking-glass, drinking-vessel, eye-glasses, glass bowls and dishes etc. It may be called an expansion of meaning after a contraction of meaning.

- **Fifth stage of contraction**

The words of this category have lost their original meaning and contracted in some other meaning in their own fields. 'Rail' may be cited for an example: *'Rail' is, originally, a track or train-path made of steel bars on which train runs, but now it is contracted and used for train:*

Similarly 'Mis-quote' and 'Separator' may be quoted.

'Mis-quote' is used for secret advice or conspiracy in Hindi-area. There may be three sources of this word:

- Mis-quote: quote wrongly.
- Mess-quote : make a mess of dirty things, muddle (business).
- Mess (house): becomes mescott in petitions being a mixture of English mess and Hindi Kot (house).

It is definite that its first part (Mis or Mess) belongs to English. The second etymology (Mess-quote: make a mess of dirty things, muddle) seems to be very correct.

Separator is a device for separating cream from milk, but now it is used for milk separated from cream.

Expansion or Widening of Meaning

When the meaning of a word is expanded and made general from specific, it is called expansion of meaning. It is less common than contraction. There may be two stages of expansion of meaning, as :

- **First Stage**

In this category, the words are used in their definite areas and are expanded in different areas also. For instance, 'Button' may be quoted :

Button means a small, usually round, bit of bone, metal for fastening, on an article of clothing, or sewn on as an ornament. Now it is used for electric-button, alongwith its normal meaning, which is pressed for ringing the bell.

Similarly 'stamp' originally meant the duty paid on legal documents. But now it came to mean stamping with the foot; imprinted mark; appliance for marking; a printed piece of paper stuck on letters, characteristic mark; affix a stamp; stamp with seal; stamp paper; etc.

- **Second Stage**

In this category, 'Copy' and 'Bearer' may be taken:

'Copy is originally used for a note-book, on which men can write, but now it occurs in several fields, as : fair-copy, copy-book, copy-right, rough-copy, copy-writer, etc.

'Bearer' is used for a person who brings a letter or message. Now it is used for a bera - cSjk in various fields, as : a bera of a Hotel, a bera of an office, a bera of picture hall, a bera of a house, etc.

Transfer of Meaning

When a meaning of a word occurs in some new meanings then it is called the transfer of meaning. Some words may be cited:

Fee, Pen, Rival, Comrade, Companion, Gate etc.

- **Fee:** The word 'fee' originally meant 'cattle', since 'cattle' were once commonly used as payment.
- **Pen:** The word pen originally meant 'quill' or 'feathers', since pens were once made of goose quills or feathers.
- **Rival:** 'Rival' originally meant pertaining to a river bank due to the concept of two landowners contending for water rights on the bank of a stream. But it has now been shifted to include a person who competes with another because he wants the same thing, or to be or do better than the other: business rivals; rivals in love, etc.
- **Comrade:** The word comrade originally meant 'room partner', but now its meaning is 'fellow' or 'loyal friend' also.
- **Companion:** It originally meant to eat bread alongwith some one, but now it is used for a 'fellow' or 'loyal friend' also.
- **Gate:** Gate originally meant 'road' and 'path', but now it has come to mean: a door; a barrier used to control the passage of water; mountain pass, etc.

Elevation of Meaning

It means to up-lift the meaning. Such words scarcely occur in languages. The word 'brave'¹ may be cited:

'Brave' is derived from 'depraved'

Degeneration of Meaning

It is opposite to elevation. An elevated meaning occurred in a degenerated meaning is called degeneration of meaning. The following example may be cited:

Buttering - It is a fatty food substance made from cream by churning, used on bread, but now it is used for flattering.

Civil Utterance

Some civil words are used in place of uncivil which have given up their original meanings. For example, 'taboo' - a word that is used for something unpleasant is replaced by another and that too is again replaced later. Thus English has had the terms privy, W.C., lavatory, toilet, bathroom, etc., and, more recently, loo. Toilet, latrine and bathroom are used in Hindi for the same meaning.

Hence, on the basis of cited above examples, it may be said that meaning-change may be occurred in various directions.

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