

Etymology – the history of words



How many words do you know?

Though we use words all day long when talking, reading and writing, we don't often think about them. There are well over a million words stuffed into the English language – we can't possibly know them all, but with a better awareness of their meanings and where they came from, we can make a start at it. To do well in the world, it's estimated that the average person needs to know 50,000 words!

Where do words come from?

Around 60% of our English **lexicon** comes from Latin and Greek. Lots of the words we use everyday come from ancient language. For example, AM and PM. Do you know what these **abbreviations** actually mean? It's 'ante meridiem' meaning 'before midday' and 'post meridian' meaning 'after midday'. Or, 'symbiosis' from Biology. It's from Greek. It means two different organisms living together for mutual benefit. But you could work this out yourself. 'Bio' means 'life' – hence Biology. 'Sym' in Greek means 'together with'. Symbiosis = together with life. Simple!

If you get this, you can start to link this up with other words. **Sympathy**, for example, is from the same root, meaning together with. What does **empathy** mean, then?

If you know that the word 'tract' means to drag or to pull, can you recognise the common part of other words like '**detract**', '**extract**', '**distract**', '**attraction**', or '**tractor**' and work out what they mean?

Lots of English words come from the Norman Invasion of 1066 – the French didn't just bring us sturdy castles and the **feudal system**. They also introduced words like **author**, **amorous**, **community**, **marriage**, **chair**, **toast**, **restaurant**, **mischievous**. You might know what they mean, but where did they come from?

Morphology is another interesting way of finding out about words – it means, the study of parts of words. This can be really helpful in helping you learn new words. For example, 'log' (from the Greek 'logos, meaning word) appears in lots of English words. If you know this, it will help you work out what they mean – try explaining '**dialogue**', '**monologue**', '**prologue**', '**epilogue**', '**eulogy**', '**anthology**', or '**syllogism**'. Does knowing 'log' means word, help? If you know that 'dia' means 2, or 'mono' 1 in Latin, or pro means before, or epi means after, can you work out the words?

BUMFUZZLE

(adj.)

confused, perplexed

Some interesting word history

'**Grammar**' – which you learn about in English and Spanish – back in the 14th century was spelt 'gramary' and, as well as meaning grammar as we know it, also meant 'learning', which was **aligned** with 'magic and enchantment'. In Scotland, grammar was spelt glamour – which also means magical beauty and charm. Not just boring parts of language!

Multi cultural language

It's not just history that has brought us new words. English has also **adopted** words from India, Iceland, Denmark – like verandah, lager, pyjamas, jodphurs. Can you find any other words that have come from around the world?

Etymology - Vocab



This week, as well as explaining what these words mean, can you find out where they came from? You will need to look in a dictionary and see what it says about word 'roots'. Consider yourselves word detectives.

- Lexicon:
- Abbreviation:
- Sympathy:.....
- Empathy:.....
- Feudal system:.....
- Detract:.....
- Extract:.....
- Distract:.....
- Attraction:.....
- Aligned:.....
- Grammar:.....
- Dialogue:.....
- Prologue:.....
- Epilogue:.....
- Monologue:.....
- Euology:.....
- Anthology:.....
- Syllogism:.....

What else I would like to know.....