

MODULE 5 CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF USAGE

Unit 1	Use and Usage in Contemporary English
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UNIT 1 USE AND USAGE IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall study the differences between use and usage as it relates to language forms and language application in contemporary English. We shall examine use and usage in linguistic style. Here the emphasis is the distinction between individual usages of language in use. Style being a hybrid in definition is examined with emphasis on the individual use in the communication process. Use and usage in linguistic grammar is also studied with emphasis on correct application language and the avoidance of extraneous factors in good grammar making. The emphasis in the study of use and usage here is the application of proper use of language forms beyond personal idiosyncrasies.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- differentiate between usage and use in contemporary English;

- know that individual language style must be in the confines of general use;
- realize that wrong usage affects proper communication;
- appreciate the need for proper language use; and
- apply the rules of use in individual English usage.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

The noun ‘use’ comes from the verb ‘use’, meaning to employ for a given purpose or put into action and larger dictionaries will list many variations and adaptations of that basic meaning. Examples are: ‘*I use a keyboard to type in these words*’ ‘*I use a knife and fork to eat my dinner*’, ‘*I use short words in speaking with small children, because they probably won’t understand long words*’. So the noun ‘use’ (with the ‘s’ as in ‘goose’, not, as for the verb, as in ‘cruise’) means a given purpose or application. Examples would be: ‘*The English language is in common use around the world*’; ‘*I put my keyboard to good use*’. For the noun ‘usage’ the basic dictionary definition can look pretty much the same as that for ‘use’, but with ‘usage’ there is a sense of ‘*continued*’ or ‘*common*’ use. And with language, the distinction is that ‘*usage*’ is the way the language is actually used, as distinct from what might look correct if you try to construct a sentence or phrase from a dictionary and grammar book. Examples would be: ‘*Although old-fashioned grammarians say you should never split an infinitive, that is done every day in common usage.*’ and ‘*I was taught at school that every sentence must have a verb, but actual usage shows that many excellent writers include in their work ‘sentences’ without verbs, such as ‘His arrival at any gathering was always a dramatic event. Bold. Arresting.*’

How useful is this distinction? Well, in everyday life it probably does not have a lot of application; it is an interesting distinction, partly because of the origin of the words. As indicated above, both *use* and *usage* come to us from the Latin *usus*, but *usage* has arrived via Old French, from the 14th century AD. But there is a very practical

consideration here. Anyone who wants to be a highly confident, fluent speaker of English would do well to develop an insatiable curiosity to know the appropriate usage, which is *a way of employing language at a higher level than technically correct use*.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Differentiate between use and usage in Contemporary English by means of ample examples.

3.2 Use, Usage, and Linguistic Style

Many definitions abound on style by different linguists and other members of the writing community at large who have made several attempts to attach a precise meaning to style. *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines style as: "A manner of writing that is characteristic of a particular writer, historical period or type of literature" (23). Style, according to M. H. Abrams, is: "The manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse. It is how a speaker or writer says whatever it is that he says" (*A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 190). From the above definitions, it is clear that the style of a writer may be analyzed in terms of its diction or choice of words; its sentence structure and syntax; the types of figurative language and other formal features. The reason for this is not far-fetched since different people see the same thing from different perspectives. In literature, style is idiosyncratic as a writer's particular way of expressing his ideas that is different from that of others, since everyone possesses a style all his own.

Language is penned down in words, the writer or speaker uses words to suit his purpose. Style is the shaping of the structure of language to suit a writer's creative and/or communicative desire. The concept of style can also be said to develop both in terms of imminent necessity and external influence. This means that, no two persons writing on the same topic or subject can address the issues from the same angle, since the issues of complexity and meaning which have roles to play would abound. Complexity in this conception is related to meaning and view point. Style is a constituent of choice made from language. In explaining the relationship between style and language, style is a "relative concept" which is identified in the traditional way by the distinction between what is said or between the content and the form of a text. The content is usually denoted by terms such as *information* or *message*. Style in communication can be analyzed in order to understand the meaning of certain information. For most communicators, meaning is derived not directly by statements but by the forms in the statements. Style in most texts involves thoughts and feelings which can be conveyed only through the use of linguistic analysis of the language forms and their functions.

From the above explanations, we can deduce that the term ‘style’ is different to understand and therefore, difficult to explain. This is because of the various perspectives and approaches that different linguists have about it. ‘Style’ is used, non-technically, in a variety of sense. It may be used to refer to the kind of systematic variation in text that is covered by such terms as ‘formal’, ‘colloquial’, ‘pedantic’, etc, and this sense of style gives rise to one very broad definition of stylistics which is “the description of the linguistic characteristics of all situationally restricted use of language” (Crystal and Davy, 30) This view which sees ‘style’ as a way language is used, is one which Leech and Short (1981) agree with. The term ‘style’ is also used to refer to those features of a text, which identifies it as being the product of a particular writer. For example, we talk of the style of Jane Austen as being characteristically different from that of Charlotte Bronte, or of the Odes of Horace as being recognizably different in style from those of Tibullus. Style is the kind of language use which is a result of a combination of a context, medium of utterance and the human beings who participate in the language activity of any situation.

This simply implies that language use has some characteristics of style in it. The effect of this is that a text, whether it is a single word text or a dual, manifests a style. The concept of style varies such that it is difficult to nail it down to a specific definition and a technical sharpness. However, we can explain ‘style’ as any distinctive way of using language peculiar to a writer, genre or period. Stylistics is frequently restricted to the analysis of literary texts from this point of view. Since the identification of a text is not generally regarded as an end itself, the determination of those features of the text which produce a particular effect upon the reader or listener, style and grammar, under the interpretation of the term ‘stylistics’, merges with what was traditionally called rhetoric.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Usage is individual style but *use* is a product of linguistic rules. Explain this statement from your understanding of *style*, *use* and *usage*.

3.3 Use and Usage in Contemporary Grammar

In grammar, certain aspects of *use* and *usage* deal with some common writing problems that do not involve rules of grammar. These problems, of parallelism, redundancy, and the like, are more rhetorical than grammatical; that is, they involve choices you must make as a writer trying to create a certain style of expression. You must determine what stylistic choices will afford greater *clarity* and *cogency* to each of your efforts to communicate. We all make different choices when faced with different communicative tasks, depending on what we feel will be most

effective. An expression that is appropriate for a formal letter may be utterly off-putting in an informal message. Of course, we also have to make these choices when we speak, but we are more likely to be aware of them in formal speech that we have conceived and outlined, if not scripted, in advance of its delivery than in off-the-cuff remarks or a routine conversation. And no doubt the audience in these more formal situations will have more exacting expectations of how we express ourselves than it would on more relaxed occasions.

A successful and distinctive writing style is an elusive bird of paradise. It is unmistakable once you see it but difficult to find. It involves many things: creating an appropriate voice for your purpose, choosing the right words for the subject and audience, constructing elegant sentences whose rhythm reinforces their meaning, presenting an argument in a logical fashion that is both engaging and easy to follow, finding vivid images to make thoughts accessible to your readers. You can probably add to this list. You may, for example, want to shock or jolt your audience rather than court it, and this strategy requires stylistic features that are quite different from those you would use for gentle persuasion.

The trouble with writing is that despite what many handbooks suggest, there are no hard and fast rules, no magic formulas that make it an easy step-by-step process. You have to re-conceive the rules every time you sit down to write because every occasion has its own specific requirements. Writing for university students is different from writing for business associates. Writing for older people is different from writing for teenagers. Writing about medicine is different from writing about sports. Writing to explain is different from writing to persuade. At the same time, it is this challenge that makes writing so interesting and rewarding. It is a process of discovery, an exploration of uncharted territory. And there are tools you can bring with you that will make the journey easier: a familiarity with your audience and your material, sensitivity to words and their connotations, and a map of some of the pitfalls that have befallen others. In this regard, we shall examine Parallelism, Passives, Redundancy, and Wordiness

i) Parallelism

Most memorable writing has as one of its recognizable features the ample use of parallel grammatical structures. A basic guideline about parallel constructions is to make sure that all the elements in a balanced pair or in a series have the same grammatical form. That is, if you start with a *that*-clause, stick with *that*-clauses; if you start with an infinitive, stick with infinitives; if you start with a participle, stick with participles; and so on. A second point is to make sure that once you have chosen the kind of grammatical forms you want to make parallel, you structure them symmetrically. Remember that an initial article, preposition,

auxiliary verb, or modifier will tend to govern all elements in the series unless it is repeated for each element. For example, if you set up a series of nouns with the first modified by an adjective, the reader will expect the adjective to modify the rest of the series as well. Thus you should say:

The building has new lighting, plumbing, and carpeting but not *The building has new lighting, plumbing, and different carpeting*.

The same is true for articles:

He brought the rod, reel, and bait.

If you want to restrict a modifier to only one noun, repeat the article for each noun:

He brought the light rod, the reel, and the bait.

Similarly, if you introduce a series of nouns with a single preposition, readers will expect that preposition to govern all the nouns:

He sent the letter to the provost, the dean, and the student who won the scholarship.

With contrastive conjunctions, it's best to repeat the preposition:

He sent the letter to the provost and the dean, but not to the student or his parents.

An auxiliary verb will govern all the verbs in the series unless you construct each verb phrase separately:

We will always value her contributions, admire her fortitude, and wish her the best.

When you spot a *faulty parallel*, recast the structure to give all the elements equivalent treatment. If your new parallel construction does not seem much of an improvement, rewrite the sentence completely to avoid the parallel construction. Better to have no parallel structures than to have parallel structures that sound overblown or stilted.

Faulty parallelism is all around us. We see and hear it every day—often without taking notice. How many times have you heard *Please leave your name, number, and a brief message?* After waiting for the tone, have you ever objected to the imperfect symmetry of this sentence?

Sometimes making sure that all the elements in a parallel construction are equivalent is not as clear-cut as it sounds, and parallelism itself can be a matter of debate: *The committee has the power of investigation, negotiation, arranging contracts, and hiring new employees*.

The panel is similarly divided when the first part of a compound verb has a series of objects, so that the second verb and its objects seem tacked on as the last element in the series. Example:

These services will use satellite, copper cable, fiber optics, cellular communications, and be accessible via suitably equipped computers.

We have constructions in which three nouns in the series are governed by the possessive *his*, while the fourth and final noun is modified by *the*: *In the hotel room the suspect had left his keys, briefcase, spare clothes, and the receipts for the cars he had rented.*

This construction in fact has the virtue of adding emphasis to the final element. *The receipts* seem to be the most important piece of evidence that the suspect left behind.

When the situation is more clear-cut, however, and something in the construction is clearly out of balance. This is the case with the coordinate conjunction *not only ... but also*, where it is easy to spot when one element is out of place:

The film makers not only concentrate on Edward VIII's abdication over his love for divorcee Wallis Simpson but also his leaning toward Nazi Germany.

Crafting sentences with flawless parallelism takes effort and practice. Even if your readers do not notice or object when you make mistakes, balance and symmetry are worth striving for in your writing. There are certain constructions that are notorious for throwing things out of whack. Some of them are: 'both ... and ...'; comparisons with 'as' and 'than'; compound verbs; 'either ... or / neither ... nor'; 'not only ... but also'; 'rather than'

ii) Redundancy

A certain amount of redundancy is built in to the English language, and we would never consider getting rid of it. Take grammatical number, for instance. Sentences such as *He drives to work* and *We are happy* contain redundant verb forms. The *-s* of *drives* indicates singularity of the subject, but we already know the subject is singular from the singular pronoun *he*. Similarly, *are* indicates a plural subject, which is already evident from the plural pronoun *we*. Number is also indicated redundantly in phrases like *this book* and *those boxes*, where the demonstrative adjective shows number and the noun does as well. But there are redundant ways of saying things that can make the rest of your writing seem foolish. Many of these are common expressions that go unnoticed in casual conversation but that stick out like red flags in writing. Why say *at this point in time* instead of *now*, or *because of the fact* when *because* will do? Something that is large in size is really just large. The trouble lies less in the expressions themselves than in their

accumulated effect. Anyone can be forgiven for an occasional redundancy, but writing that is larded with redundancies is likely to draw unwanted laughs rather than admiration.

The usages that critics have condemned as redundancies fall into several classes. Some expressions, such as *old adage*, have become fixed expressions and seem harmless enough. Others, such as *consensus of opinion*, *close proximity*, *hollow tube*, and *refer back*, can be pointlessly redundant in some contexts yet defensible in others. In these cases the use of what is regarded as an unnecessary modifier or qualifier can sometimes be justified on the grounds that it makes a real distinction in meaning. Thus, a *hollow tube* can be distinguished from one that has been blocked up with deposits, and a *consensus of opinion* can be distinguished from a *consensus of judgments* or a *consensus of practice*. In other cases the use of the qualifier is harder to defend. There is no way to *revert* without *reverting back* and no *consensus* that is not *general*. Listed below are some of the more problematic redundancies: *both, but ... however*, *close proximity*, *general consensus*, *consider as / deem as*, *cross section*, *else*, *empty rhetoric*, *equally as*, *free gift*, *from whence*, *inside of*, *mental telepathy*, *old adage*, *rarely ever / seldom ever*, *reason is because*, *reason why*, *refer back*, *revert back*, *VAT tax etc.*

iii) Wordiness

In a world in which efficiency has become a prime value, most people view economy in wording as a sign of intelligence. Its opposite, therefore, is often considered a sign of stupidity. Most of us are busy and impatient people. We hate to wait. It is irritating, which hardly helps when you are trying to win someone's goodwill or show that you know what you are talking about. What is worse, using too many words often makes it difficult to understand what is being said. It forces a reader to work hard to figure out what is going on, and in many cases the reader may simply decide it is not worth the effort. Another side effect of verbosity is the tendency to sound overblown, pompous, and evasive. What better way to turn off a reader? It is easy to recommend concision in expression but much harder to figure out how to achieve it. In general, wordy writing has three distinguishing characteristics: *weak verbs*, *ponderous nouns*, and *lots of prepositional phrases*. The three are interconnected. The key to writing clearly and concisely is to use *strong active verbs*. This means that you should only use the passive voice when you have a solid reason for doing so. If you look down a page you have written and see that you are relying on forms of the verb *be* and other weak verbs like *seem* and *appear*, you can often boil down what you have written to a fraction of its size by revising with active verbs. Relying on weak verbs forces you to shunt much of your meaning into nouns. These nouns tend to be abstract and Latinate, ending in *-ment*, -

tion, and *-ence*. The nouns themselves need a proper grammatical home, and the only way to show how they relate to other parts of the sentence is to put the nouns in prepositional phrases. Just as you can count weak verbs to test for wordiness, you can also count nouns in relation to active verbs. If there is a preponderance of nouns, consider revising the passage with strong verbs. It should be considerably shorter. But in your efforts to write clearly, you must not lose sight of the fact that good writing has other virtues beside *compactness*. Just because a statement is concise does not make it moving. Consider the following passage from a speech by Winston Churchill voicing defiance during one of the most difficult times of World War II. It could certainly be made shorter with fewer repetitions, but it would hardly be more inspiring:

We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.

A certain amount of repetition and redundancy has its uses. It never hurts to thank someone and add that you appreciate what was done. The recapitulation of the major points in a complicated essay can be a generous service to the reader, not a needless repetition. If you keep focused on what you are trying to accomplish and on what will help your readers or your listeners, you will have less need to remember formal rules of good writing. You will be able to trust your instincts and your ear.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Redundancy, wordiness and parallel repetition are good styles in usage but the use could impair meaning. Discuss

4.0 CONCLUSION

Native speakers of English apply proper use in their usage. Dialects emerge but it is far from the style of usage. For instance, in the statement "This is the key to the {lock/door}" or "This is the key for the {lock/door}" It is a matter of dialect and, perhaps, think it is far, far better to go in the opposite direction when attempting to understand what is and is not acceptable English. Native speakers are not bound by the Procrustean grammatical rules your English teachers hand down to you as some sort of immutable and inviolable laws about English usage. The "laws" of English usage are based on how people actually use the

language; people do not actually use the language based on these mythical laws. Grammar is supposed to provide a description and an explanation of why the language is spoken and written the way it is, and not as a code of how the language must be spoken and written. Those codes we call "style manuals"; they are almost 100% prescriptive and are predicated on the belief that uniformity of expression is desirable because it leads to easier comprehension. Perhaps this is true in most cases, and it certainly is true when people are writing and speaking formal English on formal occasions, but there is nothing sacred about style manuals.

5.0 SUMMARY

Rather than making some wrongheaded judgments about the lack of grammaticality of what are apparently supposed to be examples of outstanding essays in English, it would be much better to use these essays to inductively arrive at what is acceptable in English. This is how native speakers do it, just as native speakers of other languages do the same thing with their native languages. You must always ask the fundamental question when confronted with use and usage in any language. One question here is: "Is this constructed according to the grammatical rules of English?" Remember that good grammar does not always make good English. Language usage is not a function of grammar; it is, in fact, a function of individual applications within the confines of acceptability in language and discourse.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions correctly:

- i. Define *use* and *usage* within the confines on contemporary English usage.
- ii. Explain the point of convergence among *style*, *use* and *usage*.
- iii. "Wordiness could lead to boring write ups." Explain with reasons the truism in this postulation.
- iv. Correct usage may not be correct grammar. Discuss the relationship between grammaticality and style.
- v. The second language learner is more concerned with correctness than style. How would you defend this fact?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Fowler, Roger (1996). *Modern English Usage*. Oxford: OUP.

Crystal, D & Davy, D. (1969). *Investigating English Style*. London: Longman.

UNIT 2 TOOLS OF USAGE 1: ENGLISH VOCABULARY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will study an aspect of contemporary English usage which is English vocabulary. English language has a rich vocabulary form. The vast vocabulary in English results from the rich word forms which could be traced to the hybrids of linguistic experiences that the language underwent and still undergoes because of the emerging dialects and varieties of the language in the whole world. Many words are introduced into English language and this is heightened by the openness of the language as a dynamic phenomenon. In this unit, we will examine collocations, which provide the basic rule for words to co-occur and make proper meaning; synonyms and antonyms, which provide the options for choosing words of similar or opposite meanings and then confusing pairs which place side by side the occurrence of different words with almost same identical structures which results in confusion for the second language learners of English. There are many rules for recognizing English vocabulary and we will study them for quick mastery of the vocabulary usage.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- recognize that English language has a vast vocabulary structure;
- understand the rules for using English vocabulary;
- use collocations appropriately in speech and writing;
- distinguish between synonyms and antonyms;
- apply the rules for using synonyms and antonyms properly; and
- know that similarity in structure of words does not give the same meaning in usage.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

The vast English vocabulary emanated mostly from borrowing, the majority being the Germanic forms (words with German origin), the Latinate words (words with Latin origin) and French words; although there are evidence of words from other languages including African languages. The English vocabulary has changed considerably over the centuries. Germanic words (generally words of German or to a lesser extent Scandinavian origin) which include all the basics such as pronouns (*I, my, you, it*) and conjunctions (*and, or, but*) tend to be shorter than the Latinate words of English, and more common in ordinary speech. The longer Latinate words are often regarded as more elegant or educated. However, the excessive or superfluous use of Latinate words is, at times, considered by some to be either pretentious (as in the stereotypical policeman's talk of "apprehending the suspect") or an attempt to obfuscate an issue. George Orwell's essay "Politics and the English Language" criticises this style of writing, among other perceived misuse of the language.

An English speaker is in many cases able to choose between Germanic and Latinate synonyms: *come* or *arrive*; *sight* or *vision*; *freedom* or *liberty*. In some cases there is a choice between a Germanic word (*oversee*), a Latin word (*supervise*), and a French word derived from the same Latin word (*survey*). The richness of the language arises from the variety of different meanings and nuances such synonyms harbour, enabling the speaker to express fine variations or shades of thought. Familiarity with the etymology of groups of synonyms can give English speakers greater control over their linguistic register. An exception to this and a peculiarity perhaps unique to English is that the nouns for *meats* are commonly different from, and unrelated to, those for the animals from which they are produced, the animal commonly having a Germanic name and the meat having a French-derived one. Examples include: *deer* and *venison*; *cow* and *beef*; or *swine/pig* and *pork*. This is assumed to be a result of the aftermath of the Norman invasion, where a

French-speaking elite were the consumers of the meat, produced by English-speaking lower classes.

In everyday speech, the majority of words will normally be Germanic. If a speaker wishes to make a forceful point in an argument in a very blunt way, Germanic words will usually be chosen. A majority of Latinate words (or at least a majority of content words) will normally be used in more formal speech and writing, such as a courtroom or an encyclopedia article. However, there are other Latinate words that are used normally in everyday speech and do not sound formal; these are mainly words for concepts that no longer have Germanic words, and are generally assimilated better and in many cases do not appear Latinate. For instance, the words *mountain*, *valley*, *river*, *aunt*, *uncle*, *move*, *use*, *push* and *stay* are all Latinate.

English is noted for the vast size of its active vocabulary and its fluidity. English easily accepts technical terms into common usage and imports new words and phrases that often come into common usage. Examples of this phenomenon include: *cookie*, *Internet* and *URL* (technical terms), as well as *genre*, *über*, *lingua franca* and *amigo* (imported words/phrases from French, German, modern Latin, and Spanish, respectively). In addition, slang often provides new meanings for old words and phrases. In fact, this fluidity is so pronounced that a distinction often needs to be made between formal forms of English and contemporary usage.

Number of Words in English

English has an extraordinarily rich vocabulary and willingness to absorb new words. As the 'General Explanations' at the beginning of the *Oxford English Dictionary* states: The Vocabulary of a widely diffused and highly cultivated living language is not a fixed quantity circumscribed by definite limits... there is absolutely no defining line in any direction: the circle of the English language has a well-defined centre but no discernible circumference. The vocabulary of English is undoubtedly vast, but assigning a specific number to its size is more a matter of definition than of calculation. Unlike other languages, there is no academy to define officially accepted words. Neologisms are coined regularly in medicine, science and technology and other fields, and new slang is constantly developed. Some of these new words enter wide usage; others remain restricted to small circles. Foreign words used in immigrant communities often make their way into wider English usage. Archaic, dialectal, and regional words might or might not be widely considered as "English".

The *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition (*OED2*) includes over 600,000 definitions, following a rather inclusive policy: It embraces not

only the standard language of literature and conversation, whether current at the moment, or obsolete, or archaic, but also the main technical vocabulary, and a large measure of dialectal usage and slang (*Supplement to the OED*, 1933). The editors of *Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged* (475,000 main headwords) in their Preface, estimate the number to be much higher. It is estimated that about 25,000 words are added to the language each year.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss the influence of Germanic, Latinate and French usage in the development of English language vocabulary.

3.2 Collocation

Some words are married to each other to the extent that the mere mention of one requires the intrusion of the other. For instance, some adjectives are attached to some prepositions to form a complete wholistic meaning. The meaning is sometimes direct and sometimes difficult. Some verbs also occur frequently in collocations. The main reason is that the combination of the adjective or the verb with the preposition is so regular that it has become a normal trend in daily speeches and dialogues.

These words are called collocations because apart from the married nature of the words, in terms of co-occurrence, they constitute wholistic meaning in terms emphasizing realities. The occurrence of the prepositions with the adjectives or verbs helps to situate the meaning intended since prepositions occur to direct or localize the meanings in most expressions. Again, when these words co-occur, they exhibit habitual occurrences and a second language learner of English absorbs it quickly because of the fastness at grasping them for usage. It is also possible to have wrong co-occurrence of words because of the second language learner's ability at creating expressions from the existing stock of forms. These creative attempts are usually violated because most times the rules of syntactic and lexical development of words tend to be violated. The beauty of collocations is that it cuts across formal and informal usage in contemporary English.

The examples of collocations in English are enormous because almost all adjectives and verbs have words they are married to. The following examples and their meanings are commonly used in every day speech in English:

Accustomed to	--	to get used to something
Addicted to	--	to be involved in something
Afraid of	--	to be scared of someone or something

Angry with	--	not happy with someone
Compromise with	--	agree against the rules
Distinct from	--	not in line with someone or something
Envious of	--	to be jealous
Exempt from	--	to be freed from work/punishment
Grateful for/to	--	being happy with something or someone
Identical with	--	same as someone's
Innocent of	--	not guilty of an accusation
Intimate with	--	very close to someone
Peculiar to	--	especially for someone
Proficient in	--	very good at something
Tired of/with	--	fed up with something or an action
Agreed with		
Agreed upon	--	something/ someone, a plan, a proposal
Agreed to		
Differ with		
Differ from	--	someone/ an opinion
Object to	--	not to agree
Originate in	--	to start from
Confide in/to	--	to discuss or tell secretly

Collocations, well applied, result in good grammar. There are various types of collocations in English language and only with mastery that they can be used without violating the simple collocational rules. Practice and wide reading are the keys to absorbing and applying the rules of collocations.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

It is possible for words to co-occur but it is not possible for all co-occurred words to have meanings. Discuss collocational violations in English citing ample examples

3.3 Synonyms/Antonyms

Synonyms and antonyms are two important ways of developing our vocabularies. When a student recognizes that words do not operate *in vacuo* in a discourse and that most words have identical forms or forms that are nearly same in meaning or opposite in meaning, then the student would have had a vast vocabulary to be able to appreciate these grammatical situations. These are the supposedly important functions of antonyms and synonyms. We shall examine them individually.

A: Synonyms

It means words meaning same as another, that is, a word that means the same, or almost the same, as another word in the same language, either in all of its uses or in a specific context. Examples of synonyms in this sense are "environment" and "surroundings" and the verbs "tear" and "rip." It also means alternative name, that is, a word or expression that is used as another name for something in some styles of speaking or writing or to emphasize a specific aspect or association. Generally, in English vocabulary development synonyms are words which are nearly the same meaning as some other words. Examples:

Tall
 High
 Hefty
 Massive -- belong to the semantic idea of +shape/size
 Giant
 Huge
 Gigantic

The usage of these words varies since each of them cannot replace the other and still give the exact meaning. They may have related meaning but they are used in different situations for different meanings. A 'tall' person is very significant in outlook but a 'giant' looks bigger than a tall person. The former is related to normalcy while the latter is related to extraordinariness of being. Each of these words, no matter the relationship in semantic ideas with the other words, actually functions in different linguistic environment from the others. Examine critically the usage of the following words below:

Solution
 Antidote -- belong to the semantic idea of + process to normalcy
 Cure
 Remedy

These words can be rightly applied thus:

Solution to problems
Antidote to poison
Cure for disease
Remedy for trouble

Below are examples of common synonyms in English language. This may not be comprehensive but it is listed as guide for further research and enquiries. Examples:

Impeccable	--	blameless
Vaunt	--	boast
Credence	--	belief
Fortuitous	--	accidental
Vociferate	--	bawl
Exterior	--	outside
Duplicate	--	copy
Connect	--	join
Admit	--	acknowledge
Symptom	--	indication
Cease	--	discontinue
Frigid	--	cold
Motive	--	inducement
Repulsive	--	loathsome
Concession	--	reward
Endorsed	--	approved
Banned	--	prohibit
Prolific	--	productive
Waned	--	declined
Derelict	--	desert
Eschew	--	avoid
Delinquent	--	culprit
Vouchsafe	--	condescend
Demise	--	death
Negation	--	denial
Lethal	--	deadly
Assiduity	--	diligence
Obese	--	fat
Aliment	--	food
Enigma	--	puzzle
Culpable	--	blameless
Innocuous	--	harmless
Garrulous	--	loquacious

These words and their synonyms are varied. It is important to note that one word can have twenty four synonyms as in the case of the word 'insane' as shown below:

'Insane' – *mad, lunatic, cracked, unwinged, psychopath, touched, moonstruck, crazy, scatterbrained, maniacal, delirious, irrational, light-headed, incoherent, rambling, doting, wandering, amuck, frantic, raving, fixated, eccentric, demented, deranged, schizophrenic* etc

B: Antonyms

These are words that are nearly opposite in meaning to each other. Sometimes, using different word forms or using the prefix added or changed or suffix changed can result in antonyms. Examples:

1. *Antonyms of Different Words*

temporary	--	permanent
wealth	--	poverty
seldom	--	often
captivity	--	freedom
transparent	--	opaque
pedestrian	--	motorist
unite	--	separate
consolidate	--	descent
lukewarm	--	enthusiastic
dangerous	--	safe
lovely	--	odious
clarity	--	confusion

2. *Antonyms Formed with Prefix Added*

regular	--	irregular
loyal	--	disloyal
sense	--	nonsense
visible	--	invisible
mortal	--	immortal
necessary	--	unnecessary
plausible	--	implausible
comfort	--	discomfort
conscious	--	unconscious

3. *Antonyms Formed with Prefix Changed*

inside	--	outside
internal	--	external
ascend	--	descend
increase	--	decrease
export	--	import
construction	--	destruction
encourage	--	discourage
inhibit	--	exhibit

4. *Antonyms Formed by Changing the Suffix*

pitiful	-	pitiless
useful	-	useless
harmful	-	harmless
cheerful	-	cheerless
careful	-	careless

fruitful	-	fruitless
bountiful	-	bountiless
joyful	-	joyless

C: Rules Guiding Choice of Synonyms & Antonyms

To use synonyms and antonyms properly requires following certain syntactic rules. These rules help in correct grammatical usage in the communication of ideas. These rules are like concord because they allow the usage of synonyms and antonyms in agreement with content, tense and number in the grammar of English. Examples:

1. **Content:** any word that should serve as synonym or antonym of a word must belong to the same part of speech with that word.

Example:

kill [verb]	-	destroy [verb]	-	synonyms
man [noun]	-	woman [noun]	-	antonyms
fine [adjective]	-	beautiful [adjective]	-	synonyms
harmful [adverb]	-	harmless [adverb]	-	antonyms

2. **Tense:** The words must belong to the same tense. Examples:

seldom [present tense]	-	-often [present tense]	-	antonyms
killed [past tense]	-	-destroyed [past tense]	-	synonyms

3. **Number:** The words must belong to the same number. Examples:

boy [singular]	-	girl[singular]	-	antonym
men [plural]	-	women [plural]	-	antonym

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Synonyms and antonyms are used in creating alternative choices to words in different linguistic environments. State the rules for these choices with ample example

3.4 Confusing Pairs

Some words in English look alike in structure. Sometimes, the difference in word structures will be so insignificant that students disregard it and classify the words as belonging to the same family or the same meaning. Sometimes, they interchange them in usage and most times they result as spelling errors because a particular word is used to represent another because they look alike. Most times students spell one in place of the other and may also become mindless of the error that might cause. This is a serious case because English language has over

5,000 of such words. We shall identify a few here because of space and advise the students, especially the serious ones, to search for more of these words in thesaurus, other book of grammar or most importantly in good dictionaries. We shall examine some of them below:

Satisfy	canon	born	check	cue
Certify	cannon	borne	cheque	queue
	dessert	accept	adapt	essay
	desert	except	adopt	assay
	Stationary	vain	quiet	moral
	Stationery	vein	quite	morale
	fate	Tract	berth	affect
	faith	Track	birth	effect
	differ	alter	feature	coma
	defer	altar	future	comma
	Vacation	lose	sight	poke
	Vocation	loose	site	pork
			Cite	
	Whether	key	goal	hoard
	Weather	quay	gaol	horde
	latter	pen	ring	right
	later	pain	wring	rite
	Prey	canvass	human	patent
	Pray	canvas	humane	patient
	Haul	would	could	suit
	Hall	wood	cold	shoot
	cool			
	cull			

The list is numerous. The spelling differences are so insignificant. Most of them are pronounced alike and when students are in a dictation class, they are likely to write one for another. The advice is that the students should find out the meaning of such similar words from good dictionaries and learn the appropriate placements for each of them. Only this practice can save the intelligent ones from this clash of vocabulary similarities.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Find out the meaning of the words listed below and use them correctly in sentences:

- | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------|
| (i) canvas/canvass | (ii) defer/differ | (iii) |
| human/humane | | |
| (iv) lost/lust | (v) horde/hoard | (vi) |
| heaven/haven | | |

4.0 CONCLUSION

English language vocabulary has vast choices for the language scholars. Contemporary writing at its worst does not consist in picking out words for the sake of their meaning and inventing images in order to make the meaning clearer. It consists in gumming together long strips of words to make meaning. Collocations entail proper selections of words that co-occur to make meaning in grammatical situations. The words are so used to each other that they occur together in order to generate an idea. Synonyms aim at explaining that every word has alternative. The alternatives could occur in the same environment or similar environment in order to generate meaning. Although no two words could have the same meaning but there are closeness in meaning among words in conveying particular meanings in different situations. Antonyms reveal that some words could be nearly opposite in meaning and could be used as alternative words in opposite situations. All these pertain to word choice. The confusing pairs are lexical pairs that result in confused usage because of similarities in word structure. They lead to spelling, pronunciation and syntactic errors because of misapplication of usage. To master the differences is to apply correct vocabulary usage. In contemporary English usage, it is apparent to study collocations, antonyms, synonyms and confusing pairs in order to avoid avoidable lexical and syntactic aberrations. All these are acceptable in almost all the dialects of English.

5.0 SUMMARY

In order to be a better user of English language vocabularies, there are at least four questions to ask as guide: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What meaning I'm I trying to make? Is this word enough to have the intended effect in my expression? The other questions are: Could I have used a better word? Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly? In contemporary English usage, collocations, antonyms, synonyms and confusing pairs could impair correct usage and meaning. The use of good dictionaries like *Oxford* dictionaries of current or contemporary usage, *Chambers*, *Random House*, *Longman* among others and a good thesaurus like *Roget's Thesaurus* will help in solving this dilemma.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions with adequate examples:

- i. What are the effects of borrowing in the development of English Language Vocabularies?
- ii. Using proper examples, discuss the proper application of collocations in conveying meanings

- iii. Use the following synonyms in proper grammatical situations: (i) like (ii) admire (iii) appreciate (iv) love
- iv. Generate the antonyms of the following words: (i) hope (ii) house (iii) current (iv) conscious
- v. Explain the meaning of the following pairs of words and use them correctly in sentences: (i) gamble/gambol (ii) rush/rash (iii) moan/mourn (iv) crash/crush

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3 TOOLS OF USAGE 2: IDIOMS, PHRASAL VERBS AND CATCH PHRASES AS CLICHÉS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 Idioms
 - 3.3 Phrasal Verbs
 - 3.4 Catch Phrases
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will study the proper application of idiomatic expressions, phrasal verbs and catch phrases in contemporary English, even though, they have been tagged clichés. Idioms and proverbs are regarded as archaic usage because they are colloquial expressions of realities. Many contemporary English users tend to avoid the use of these available grammatical sequences because they feel that the expressions lack formality and are restricted in usage. Even phrasal verbs seem to be relegated to the spoken medium and treated as clichés also. We shall examine the proper use of these expressions in semantic occurrences in contemporary usage by stating the adequacy of their usage in communication. Contemporary English adopts and adapts clichés because they add meaning, beauty and logic to expressions.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- understand the meaning and uses of clichés;
- differentiate between idiomatic and normal meaning of clichés;
- use idiomatic expressions correctly in speech and writing;
- know that phrasal verbs function like idioms;
- realize their importance in Contemporary English usage;
- see clichés as open for new linguistic forms to occur; and
- avoid the use of catch phrases in their speech and writing.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

In English most words of idiomatic meaning are regarded as clichés. They are also seen as archaic and informal in usage. A cliché (from French, /klɪˈʃe/) is a phrase, expression, or idea that has been overused to the point of losing its intended force or novelty, especially when at some time it was considered distinctively forceful or novel. The term is most likely to be used in a negative context. "Cliché" applies also to almost any situation, plot device, subject, characterization, figure of speech, or object—in short, any sign—that has become overly familiar or commonplace. Because the novelty or frequency of an expression's use varies across different times and places, whether or not it is a cliché depends largely on who uses it, the context in which it is used, and who is making the judgment. The meaning of a particular cliché may shift over time, often leading to confusion or misuse.

When a type of media can be identified as using a cliché, this is often interpreted as the writer running out of original ideas and resorting to less imaginative concepts. For this reason, it is nearly always a negative point in creative media. Exceptions include in comedy, where the situation gains humour for being cliché. Examples of concepts that can be clichés (note - it is very possible to use one of these devices in a creative way, without it being cliché). Consider the continuous use of Clichés in this passage:

I make no bones about it. I'm not going to beat around the bush. I need to clear the air, settle an old score and kill a sacred cow. I had an English teacher whose last name was English. She was hard as nails and long in the tooth. Ms. English, as every schoolboy in her class learned, had an axe to grind when it came to clichés. Ms. English would get on her highest high horse and in her best pedantic style would drill a hard and fast rule: "mind your Ps and Qs you young men and avoid clichés like the plague."

Pointing her thin bony index finger at the ceiling, she would with wispy lips and piercing eyes, cackle, "If you don't, heads will roll." Then, pushing her face toward us she would, in her mad as a wet hen voice, say, "Do you read me-loud and clear?" Man, did she have an attitude. The classroom would get so quiet you could hear a pin drop.

Most of what Ms. English told me went in one ear and out the other. I could get away with an occasional split infinitive or dangling participle, but clichés were Ms. English's last straw. When it came to clichés, we had to be letter perfect. She had a motto of live and learns, but Ms. English's intense dislike of clichés made her motto seem more like learn or die.

She said that what separates the men from the boys is that real men don't use clichés. Just like that, it was an open-and-shut case. I was young; I couldn't have cared less. You know, boys will be boys, free and easy, sort of a captain of your own soul type thing. Silently, I'd say to myself: "heavens to Betsy Ms. English, you don't have to get your nose out of joint every time I use a cliché." But, if I didn't get all my clichés out of my essays there was hell to pay. Ms. English and I always seemed to be at loggerheads. Imagine, she accused me of having a chip on my shoulder.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

List all the expressions used as clichés in the first two paragraphs of the passage above and explain their meanings.

3.2 Idiomatic Expressions

An idiom is a word or phrase which means something different from what it says - it is usually a metaphor. Because idioms can mean something different from what the words mean, it is difficult for someone not very good at speaking the language to use them properly. Some idioms are only used by some groups of people or at certain times. The idiom *break a leg*, means good luck to an actor about to start acting, but not to other people. Idioms are not the same thing as slang. Idioms are made of normal words that have a special meaning known by almost everyone. Slang has to do with special words that are known only by a particular group.

To learn a language, a person needs to learn the words in that language, and how and when to use them. But people also need to learn idioms separately because certain words together or at certain times can have different meanings. In order to understand an idiom, one sometimes needs to know the culture the idiom comes from. To know the history of an idiom can be useful and interesting, but is not necessary to be able to use the idiom properly. For example, most native British English speakers know that "No room to swing a cat" means "there was not a lot of space" and can use the idiom properly, but few know it is because 200 years ago sailors were punished by being whipped with a whip called a "cat o'nine tails". A big space was cleared on the ship so that the person doing the whipping had a lot of room to swing the cat.

Some Common Idioms in Contemporary English

To break a leg	--	A way to wish someone good luck
To live it up	--	Live wild, Enjoy life; go to a lot of parties
Kick the bucket	--	To die
Shed crocodile tears	--	To cry about something but without actually caring
Wild goose chase	--	Useless journey or pursuit
No room to swing a cat	--	There was not a lot of space
Pay through the nose	--	Pay a lot of money

Some other examples are:

Make no bones about something
 To beat around the bush
 To clear the air
 To settle an old score
 To kill a sacred cow
 Long in the tooth
 To have an axe to grind
 Highest high horse
 A hard and fast rule
 Heads will roll
 Mad as a wet hen
 To have an attitude
 To hear a pin drop
 In one ear and out the other
 The last straw
 To learn or die
 To separate the men from the boys
 An open-and-shut case
 To be captain of your own soul
 To get your nose out of joint
 To have hell to pay
 A chip on my shoulder

Many other idioms are used in the passage in section 3.1, the general overview section of this unit. Study them to know the various meanings in the application. English has a rich stock of idioms that are used in embellishing speech and writing.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain the meaning of the unexplained idioms in this section.

3.3 Phrasal Verbs

A phrasal verb is a combination of a verb and preposition, a verb and adverb, or a verb with both an adverb and preposition, any of which are part of the syntax (of the sentence), and so are a complete semantic unit. Its sentences may, however, contain direct and indirect objects in addition to the phrasal verb. Phrasal verbs are particularly frequent in the English language. A phrasal verb often has a meaning which is different from the original verb. According to Tom McArthur: "...the term 'phrasal verb' was first used by Logan Pearsall Smith, in *Words and Idioms* (1925), in which he states that the *Oxford English Dictionary* Editor Henry Bradley suggested the term to him. Alternative terms for phrasal verb are 'compound verb', 'verb-adverb combination', 'verb-particle construction' (VPC), AmE "two-part word/verb" and 'three-part word/verb' (depending on the number of particles), and multi-word verb. 'Preposition' and 'adverb' as used in a phrasal verb are also called 'particle' in that they do not alter their form through inflections (are therefore uninflected, they do not accept affixes, etc.).

Phrasal verbs are usually used informally in everyday speech as opposed to the more formal Latinate verbs, such as "to get together" rather than "to congregate", "to put off" rather than "to postpone", or "to get out" rather than "to exit". Many verbs in English can be combined with an adverb or a preposition, and readers or listeners will easily understand a phrasal verb used in a literal sense with a preposition: "He walked across the square." Verb and adverb constructions can also easily be understood when used literally: "She opened the shutters and looked outside."; "When he heard the crash, he looked up." An adverb in a literal phrasal verb modifies the verb it is attached to, and a preposition links the subject to the verb. A phrasal verb contains either a preposition or an adverb (or both), and may also combine with one or more nouns or pronouns. Phrasal verbs that contain adverbs are sometimes called "particle verbs", and are related to separable verbs in other Germanic languages. There are two main patterns: intransitive and transitive.

An intransitive particle verb does not have an object:

When I entered the room he looked up.

A transitive particle verb has a nominal object in addition to the adverb. If the object is an ordinary noun, it can usually appear on either side of the adverb, although very long noun phrases tend to come after the adverb:

Switch off the light.

Switch the light off.

Switch off the lights in the hallway next to the bedroom the president is sleeping in.

Idiomatic usage of Phrasal Verbs

It is, however, the figurative or idiomatic application in everyday speech which makes phrasal verbs so important: "I hope you will get over your operation quickly."; "Work hard, and get your examination over." The literal meaning of "to get over", in the sense of "to climb over something to get to the other side", no longer applies to explain the subject's enduring an operation or the stress of an examination which they have to overcome. It is when the combined meaning of verb plus adverb, or verb plus preposition is totally different from each of its component parts, that the semantic content of the phrasal verb cannot be predicted by its constituent parts and so becomes much more difficult for a student learning English to recognize. Other idiomatic usages of phrasal verbs show a verb + direct object + preposition/adverb + indirect object construction. Some idioms are formed from phrasal verbs, such as *to let the cat out of the bag*. Idioms have a meaning which is different from the meaning of the single words that make them up, and usually have a fixed word order. Other such idioms include among many other examples in the dictionary such phrases as *to add insult to injury*, *to add fuel to the flames*, *to leave someone in the lurch*, *to scare someone out of their wits*, etc.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Phrasal verbs have grammatical and idiomatic functions in English. Differentiate between the two with examples.

3.4 Catch Phrases

Under pressure to create (usually against a deadline), a writer will naturally use familiar verbal patterns rather than thinking up new ones. Inexperienced writers, however, will sometimes go further, and string together over-used phrases or even *sentences*. Consider the following example: *When all is said and done, even a little aid can go a long way in a country suffering from famine*. The argument is commendable, but its written expression is poor and unoriginal. First, consider the phrase "when all is said and done." Once, this phrase was clever and original, but so many millions of writers and speakers have used it so many times

over so many years that the phrase has become automatic and nearly meaningless. This type of worn-out phrase is called a *catch phrase*, and you should *always* avoid it in your writing, unless you are quoting someone else: your own, original words are always more interesting.

A particularly stale catch phrase- especially one which was once particularly clever- is a *cliché*. In the example given above, the phrase "a little aid can go a long way" fits into the formula "a little *** can go a long way," seriously lowers the quality of the writing. Essentially, a cliché is a catch phrase which can make people groan out loud, but the difference between the two is not that important -- just remember that neither usually belongs in your writing. There is no simple formula that you can apply to decide what is a cliché or a catch phrase, but the more you read, the better your sense of judgement will become. Remember, though -- if you think that a phrase in your writing is clever, *and* you know that someone has used the phrase before, then you are best rewriting it into your own words.

While clichés and catch phrases have no place in academic essays, there are some times of writing where you should use pre-existing formulas. Such documents include scientific papers, legal briefs, maintenance logs, and police reports (to name a few) -- these are highly repetitive and largely predictable in their language, but they are meant to convey highly technical information in a standard, well-defined format, not to persuade or entertain a reader -- creativity in an auditor's report, for example, would not be highly prized. On the other hand, catch phrases are not appropriate in less technical areas. Journalists, especially, are under a pressure to produce a large amount of writing quickly, and those who are less talented or unable to meet the pressure will often end up writing entire articles made up of over-used catch phrases like "war-torn Bosnia," "grieving parents," or "besieged capital."

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Write a brief essay and identify the catch phrases you have made a consistent part of your speaking and writing behavior.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In contemporary English usage, idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs tend to be rarely used. In most cases the phrasal verbs are misused because of the lack of knowledge that they function idiomatically in expressions. Idioms are like proverbs because they capture a people's worldview and the interpretation of their social realities. Idioms have layers of meanings and each meaning is relevant in given situations of reference. Idioms well applied in speech and writing helps to make one's expressions carry some interesting colours. When we speak and

write without certain linguistic colourings like idioms and phrasal verbs, the audience tends to describe such speeches as boring. Idioms add excitement, interest and logic to our expressions. However, the misuse of idioms results in clichés because too much of every thing is bad. One should also avoid using phrasal verbs if the meaning is not related to what is being described or discussed. Again, catch phrases should be avoided. That you hear people speak them does not mean that they are necessary. Certain linguistic habits of people may be as a result of lack of knowledge or less education.

5.0 SUMMARY

Idioms and phrasal verbs are important when used correctly in speech and writing. English language has vast idiomatic expressions which are traceable from the Germanic, French and the Anglo-Saxon era. These idioms carry a people's experiences make their speech and writing carry deeper meanings. These idioms have survived till today and many new ones have also emerged from the different dialects of English existing worldwide. It will not be surprising getting different Australian English idioms, South African English idioms, Canadian English idioms or getting different versions of the same idioms in different locations of English users. This is also the same with phrasal verbs. Even catch phrases with their archaic roots in English have refused to vanish in current English usage but it is hoped that the contemporary English users should avoid or minimize the usage in speech and writing.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions:

- i. Explain the importance of idiomatic expressions in contemporary English.
- ii. Discuss the structure and function of phrasal verbs as idioms.
- iii. Assess correctly when idioms and catch phrases become clichés.
- iv. Catch phrases are correct expressions but have outlived their usage. How true is this assertion?
- v. What are the basic effects of clichés in contemporary English usage?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

- Abrams, M. H. (1987) *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 4th Edition. New York: Rinehart and Winston.
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UNIT 4 TOOLS OF USAGE 3: DICTION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 Diction and Usage
 - 3.3 Register and Diction
 - 3.4 Connotation and Denotation
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will study one aspect of our writing and speaking which is *diction*. Diction refers to our choice of words in speech and writing. A good writer must know his diction. A good speaker must know his diction. When our essays are full of bad diction we might offend our listeners. In some cases we might even be shocked to see that our audience reacted the way we never expected. We will study the meaning and application of diction, relationship between diction and register and then the concepts of connotation and denotation. Sometimes, our choice of words may connote something different from what the audience expected.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- understand the meaning of diction;
- know the relationship between diction and register;
- appreciate the importance diction in contemporary usage;
- realize when they use bad diction;
- distinguish between connotation and denotation in choice of diction; and
- select correct diction for their writing and speeches.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.

- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

Diction is the use, choice and arrangement of words and modes of expression, the manner of speaking or any vocal expression. Some linguists categorize diction as expression language, phrase, phraseology, style, verbiage, vocabulary, wording, words. Diction is general, wording is limited. We speak of the diction of an author or of a work, the wording of a proposition or of a resolution etc. Abrams says that diction signifies the choice of words, phrases and figures in a work of literature. He states that a writer's diction can be analyzed under such categories as the degree to which his vocabulary and phrasing are abstract or concrete, Latinate or Anglo-Saxon in origin, colloquial or formal, technical or common, literal or figurative. This view seems outmoded, as the word diction has been broadened beyond Abrams' analysis. Shaw seems to capture the idea of diction better when he states that diction has been broadened in meaning to refer to one's whole style of speaking and writing. Thus, a speaker can be distinguished for his forceful and precise diction. By forceful diction, Shaw means choice of words that are powerful, assertive and strong willed. In this respect, some outspoken writers delight in using words and phrases that appear deliberately offensive.

Diction can determine the difficulty of a text and thus help to make a distinction between the children's and adult's literature. This shows that the use of diction in a work of art can help in comprehending the writer's message. It further strengthens the claim that its readers can use diction to access the readability and accessibility of a work. Hence diction is often analyzed in works as *simple*, *elevated*, *technical* and *esoteric*. Of these categorizations, simple diction is aptly commensurate with the choice of words used in the play being studied where the great chunk of words is short, powerful sentences that are compact in form of action verbs and repetitions used to drive home the message. It also shows the degree to which readers comprehend the literary work for what it is.

Let us corroborate the use of diction in assessing the readability of a work in Wole Soyinka's *The Road*. In this play, the "word" used by the writer is the elusive word. He is trying to experience the essence of death without really dying. A reader has to read between and beyond the line to understand its meaning. This shows the obscurity of Soyinka's diction. Soyinka's *The Interpreters* has obscurity of diction – one of the

traits typical of his (Soyinka's) diction. Soyinka's *The Interpreters* has been described as unreadable. A good example comes from the opening paragraph of the second part of the novel:

The rains of May become in July slit arteries of the sacrificial bull, a million bleeding punctures of the sky-blue hidden in convulsive cloud humps, black overfed for this one event. The blood of earth-dwellers mingles with balanced streams of the mocking bull, and flows into currents eternally below the earth. The dome cracked above Sekoni's short-sighted head one messy night
(155).

The passage is saying that Sekoni died in a motor accident. But Soyinka says this in the most cryptic manner. Soyinka's diction, which has compactness and ruggedness, adds to the difficulty in understanding his message. Your *diction* is simply your choice of words. There is *no* single, correct diction in the English language; instead, you choose different words or phrases for different contexts.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain why Wole Soyinka's diction is often described as difficult.

3.2 Diction and Deviation

Deviation is another aspect of use of diction. Deviation arises as soon as we set particular linguistic acts against the apparent norm and it happens in two ways. First, there is statistical deviation which would make a feature a minority usage. Deviation in this instance is, Soyinka's "meral terptitude" a good example where the words 'moral' is used as 'meral' and 'fond' is used as 'fend' by Prof. Oguazor in *The Interpreters*. Also, Armah's 'countrey' in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* connotes the disorderliness and corruption in Ghana while Osofisan's corruption of the lexical item: "subordination sah", "Shorrop!" "concubility", "Jagbajantis", "nineteen *gbongborongbon*" (62- 63) shows the departure from conventional spellings and word order. The excerpts containing these derivations are taken from Osofisan's play *Morountodun*. However, these lexical items as used here add to the liveliness of the scene and create laughter among the audience. The point is that characters are made to use language in ways that characterize them. The two lexical items 'jagbajantis' and 'gbongborongbon' cannot be pinned down to any specific meaning. They are however, words meant to show the speaker's attitude to the object and time under discussion respectively. They are also used for ideophonic effect. They are deliberate mimicking words and their ideophonic values point to uselessness, worthlessness etc.

The second is different from the first because of the choice of words. In the second 'kind' is replaced by 'here' and these result in a very different meaning. In terms of choice of words, the second and the third are exactly the same, but the organization, the sequence, is different and this again results in different meaning. A good diction allows the writer to communicate meaning to the readers in terms of appropriateness, specificity, imagery and figures of speech. The use of good diction implies skilful choice of words used to express clearly the speaker or writer's ideas. The language we speak or write varies according to the type of situation in which we use language. It is important to add that in diction, words are often chosen by the writer to express the situation of the conversation, as well as the mood of the speaker to hearer or object of criticisms. This clearly shows diction as part of register.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Differentiate between a good and a bad diction in relation to deviation and meaning.

3.3 Diction and Register

Halliday defines Register as a variety of language distinguished according to use. Register also refers to a list of words, not only words but whole expressions i.e. combination of words in higher units, expressions or terms that are regularly used in relation to a particular area of human endeavour and development. This definition elucidates the fact that diction and register are synonymous and interwoven. (i.e. choice or list of words, expressions or terms that are regularly used in relation to a particular subject or associated with a particular area.

Diction is defined as choice of words and expressions. In diction, writers choose words or utterances so as to convey information about subject matter (referential meaning). However beyond reference, words are chosen to express something about the situation of the conversation itself that is, the mood of the speaker (otherwise known as tone in register) the relative social position of the interlocutors and the degree of formality of the occasion. It is pertinent to state that differences in register arise as a result of the various or diverse uses to which words are put by different categories of people. In an attempt to express needs and experiences unique to the activities of a particular group, each group has to be associated with a specific register. The result is that each group has its own distinctive way of saying things that are peculiar to the profession. The same obtains in diction. The main thrust here is that (lexis) or choices of words are important elements in register.

The three important concepts that are to be considered when discussing register are also important in discussing diction i.e. field of discourse,

mode of discourse and tenor. Field in register is the subject matter of discourse e.g. the choice of words when discussing political issues will differ from the choice of word when discussing medical or religious issues. From this analysis, it is obvious that the choice of words (diction) used determines the field of a register. This is the link between diction and register. So we discover that lexical items referring to the Bible and the church characterize the play. The mode of discourse i.e. the medium of communication is significant in register and diction.

Tenor, is also used for register analysis and deals with interpersonal relationships of the participants i.e. the speech of characters in its role of indicating social standing of speaker to a hearer i.e. politeness, familiarity and rudeness of tone. Tenor in diction also has to do with the mood of the speaker or the situation of the conversation and the relative social position of the interlocutors. Tenor also deals with the solidarity between a speaker/writer and his/her audience. Our choices of words reflect relationships. Let us look at the expression below as an example:

- (a) Please reduce the volume of that radio.
- (b) Switch off that radio
- (c) Turn that rack down.

The mood of the speaker and the relationship will determine the occasion of use or tone. For example:

- (a) shows that the speaker is speaking to a colleague
- (b) shows that the speaker is speaking to a junior person and over whom he has authority
- (c) indicates that the speaker has considerable degree of authority and can also be used over peer-group in a very informal situation.

The occasion of use here determines the choice of these words. The uses of technical words like *switch*, *reduce*, *turn* and *rack* e.t.c. define the register. This is the link between register and diction.

Furthermore, the terms *formal* and *informal* are words that are common to both register and diction. Formal diction, for instance, consists of a dignified, impersonal and elevated use of language. It is often characterized by complex words and lofty tone whereas in register formality could also be described as standard used in polite circles, educated equivalents e.t.c. Informal diction represents the plain language of everyday use and often includes idiomatic expressions and many simple common words while informal register has to do with casual, colloquial expressions used familiarly such as slang and vulgarisms. This is another area where register and diction are synonymous. It is crucial to state that in register and diction formality and informality depend on occasion of use. This is why register is important in the consideration of diction.

However, when the individual comes to his trade area or profession, there is a kind of ‘transformation’ or ‘switching’. Usually, there will be some set of lexical items habitually used for handling subjects in a particular field. For instance, in the play being studied phrases like *Paternoster, Nun, padre* etc reflect the register of religion. The first observation from the example given above is that each field has some peculiar phrase structure and individual words that mark them or define their field. Also, the choice of words used to reflect or portray the oppression going on in the text falls into the field of politics. This is the link between register and diction.

It is crucial to add that the markers or features of linguistic configurations are choices or selections used e.g. *detained, beaten, raped, castrated*. These belong to the field of oppression. Each field has some peculiar phrase structure and individual words that mark them or define their field. In other words, if we are looking for the crucial criteria that define a particular register, we can look at its grammar or lexis. Since our emphasis is on lexis, the particular choice of words selected, are common core features. Lexical items refer to individual words that occur most predominantly in a field, thus helping to define it e.g. the choice of the lexical items *rosary, church, heaven, the saved* may easily be associated with religious field because it helps to show what the people are involved in. So also is the choice of words in the field of politics. They show the socio-political situation of the people. These help to define the register of politics and are the features that mark it out as distinctive.

From the review of diction and register, we have seen how choice of words and technical phrases help to determine a field. It is clear that the words that are combined may help identify a particular field i.e. *we were jailed, crushed and bruised*. These choices of words form the register of oppression. The same pattern may be observed in the register of religion and politics. Knowledge of register studies gives us an awareness of the choice of correct words to use.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Diction and register are dependent on choice of words, yet they are different. Explain the points of departure

3.4 Connotation and Denotation

The relationship between words and meanings is extremely complicated, and belongs to the field of *semantics*. For now, though, what you need to know is that words do not always have single, simple meanings. Traditionally, grammarians have referred to the meanings of words in two parts: *denotation*: a literal meaning of the word; *connotation*: an

association (emotional or otherwise) which the word evokes. For example, both "woman" and "chick" have the denotation "adult female" in North American society, but "chick" has somewhat negative connotations, while "woman" is neutral. For another example of connotation, consider the following:

Negative : There are over 2,000 *vagrants* in the city.

Neutral: There are over 2,000 *people with no fixed address* in the city.

Positive: There are over 2,000 *homeless* in the city.

All three of these expressions refer to exactly the same people, but they will invoke different associations in the reader's mind: a "vagrant" is a public nuisance while a "homeless" person is a worthy object of pity and charity. Presumably, someone writing an editorial in support of a new shelter would use the positive form, while someone writing an editorial in support of anti-loitering laws would use the negative form. In this case, the dry legal expression "with no fixed address" quite deliberately avoids most of the positive or negative associations of the other two terms -- a legal specialist will try to avoid connotative language altogether when writing legislation, often resorting to archaic Latin or French terms which are not a part of ordinary spoken English, and thus, relatively free of strong emotional associations.

Many of the most obvious changes in the English language over the past few decades have had to do with the connotations of words which refer to groups of people. Since the 1950's, words like "Negro" and "crippled" have acquired strong negative connotations, and have been replaced either by words with neutral connotations (ie "black," "handicapped") or by words with deliberately positive connotations (ie "African-Canadian," "differently-abled").

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Explain connotation and denotation in relation to choice of diction.

4.0 CONCLUSION

A good choice of diction is very important in speech and writing. A good speaker is someone who has a good mastery of appropriate diction. Using the toughest of words and phrases does not make us better writers. Wole Soyinka has been criticized for making his works inaccessible to his readers because of his choice of difficult diction. It is not all the time that one needs dictionary in order to understand our speeches and writings. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is highly praised because of its subtle diction which makes it easy to grasp. The novel is read across ages from the primary school to the university with less difficulty. Some writers believe that high sounding words in their

works will make them appear very highly placed but this is wrong because obscurantism is the bane of good communication. Your reader and your listener want to understand you not getting confused because you are using difficult diction. So, in writing your essays, choose simple diction for your writing even in speeches choose less difficult lexis because you are communicating, not confusing your readers and audience.

5.0 SUMMARY

Diction is the study of word choices. A good diction is the mark of a good writer and speaker. Diction could result in deviation if what is written results in obscure interpretation. Diction and register are related as both of them pertain to word choice in our speaking and writing repertoires. Register is strict diction because it relates to choice of words within a given environment, profession or vocation. However, the term diction absorbs register in another sense. Sometimes, the words we choose could connote what we never intended saying. This type of situation occurs when there is no linguistic harmony between the speaker and the hearer. It is possible to write correct nonsense because of our choice of words. In contemporary English usage, there is the need to use simplified diction to foster communication, especially with the emerging dialects of English bringing in varieties of diction on a daily basis.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions correctly:

- i. Explain the major causes of obscure diction
- ii. Clearly differentiate diction from register
- iii. Discuss with examples the meaning of connotation and denotation in diction
- iv. What is deviation in diction? Use ample examples in your answer
- v. In a second language situation, do you believe that obscure diction would enhance communication? Explain thoroughly

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 5 INTERNET ENGLISH/WEB WRITING

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 English as Internet Language
 - 3.3 Writing E-mails
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- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will study the use of English language on the Internet. English language is regarded as the most widely used language on the Internet. Most linguists believe that English is widely used on the Internet because of the influence of America and Britain in the development of world technology especially in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). In most computers the version of English in use is the American English with options to choose the other dialects of English, if desired. This means that most computer producers have direct relationship with American technological requirements. English in use in the internet is a contemporary usage. The internet is widely used from the late 20th century which marked the rise of contemporary English. We will study the rise of internet English, the characteristics of internet English, English use in e-mails, web surfing, group mails, the use of English in internet chat and other aspects of English use on the Internet, like advertisement and announcement.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- recognize the existence of Internet English;
- understand the characteristics of Internet English;
- appreciate the importance of English in Internet business;
- distinguish Internet English from the other varieties; and
- discuss English in the Internet as a contemporary variety.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers

3.0 MAIN CONTENT**3.1 General Overview**

Access to the Internet is empowering. It gives access to uncensored material of enormous variety; access to a world-size encyclopedia; access to almost instant communication with individuals located thousands of miles away. A person using the Internet can adopt a new persona, you can change gender, acquire beauty, lose disability, develop aggression. On the Internet, there is information, entertainment and insight into other cultures. Various governments have attempted to control some of this information, either in terms of what can be placed in URLs or in terms of what can be downloaded. But so far no effective way of controlling the reading of documents placed on the web has been found. We may be in a Golden Age of Net use, when controls become more effective and when more sites are either commercially motivated or no longer cost-free, we will lose the present sense of uncensored liberty. However, this empowerment has on the whole been extended most to those who are already most empowered. To gain good access to the web, three things are needed:

- to live in a location that supports the technology needed to gain access
- to have access to a service provider
- to be able to use English

In the early 90s, many countries did not possess servers that were linked to the web. Africa was worst hit, with only Egypt, Morocco, South Africa and Zambia as having access. Europe, both East and West, was well covered, as was both North and South America. In many countries which do have Internet access, large portions of the population live in rural areas, away from the electricity and telephone provision that supports this basic access, or are not wealthy enough to have such facilities themselves. Even within wealthy countries with effective electricity and telephone systems, the nearest service provider may be sufficiently far from some rural users to make accessing the web

prohibitively expensive, due to the cost of long distance or satellite telephone calls.

After the establishment of the Internet by the military in the USA, it was universities that first took advantage of the web. To this day, academic users of the web (mostly on *edu* and *ac* servers) are especially privileged. They have unusually free access to the Internet, seldom paying for their own access time, and seldom accountable for their use of it. In some universities there may be corporate constraints on the Internet-users' freedom to develop their own sites. Users in commercial organisations and governmental organisations generally experience less freedom. In many countries access through educational, commercial and governmental bodies preceded the availability of private Internet accounts, and corporate users still dominate the Internet. Private access to the Internet has developed over the 1990s, although there are still technical and commercial problems in private accounts, as the recent blockages at America Online have shown. Many countries have been slow to provide private access to the Internet. Even where private access is possible, it is costly, with rental fees and telephone costs being added to very substantial hardware costs. In the UK, for example, the average cost of a computer is around £2000. Thus, someone in full time work would have to spend 6 weeks' salary on a computer. The lower the national and individual salary, the more this cost becomes out of reach. In countries with lower average salaries, like Nigeria, computers tend to be more expensive both in real and proportional terms. The first two things needed for Internet access make it an advantage:

- to be in a country with good electricity supply, good telephonic connections and the political will to allow Internet access
- within those countries, to be an academic user, a user with other corporate access, or wealthy enough to afford a private account

These requirements, essentially economic in foundation, point to countries with high GNP, and to an urban environment within them.

World Distribution of English Users/Internet Users

However, the third thing helpful for Internet access, the ability to use English, divides the world into rather different groupings. Sociolinguists have traditionally grouped countries into three categories according to the dominant pattern of English use within them:

- *English as a Native Language*: Most people grow up speaking English at home. Here, English is the dominant language of daily usage for most people. (examples: UK, USA, Australia) (ENL)
- *English as a Second Language*: Those who know English mostly learnt it after they had learned another language. English is often

learnt at school. English is used (by varying proportions of the population) in everyday and in official usage, with citizens often speaking to each other in English. (examples: India, Singapore, Ghana, Nigeria, Philippines) (ESL)

- *English as a Foreign Language*: Those who know English mostly learnt it at school. English is hardly ever spoken within the country (outside English lessons). (Examples: France, Japan, Thailand) (EFL)

Due to patterns of migration (voluntary and forced) and colonization involving people from the British Isles, ENL and ESL countries are predominantly countries which were formerly British territories or (in the case of the Philippines) territories of one of Britain's former colonies. These countries are geographically widespread. EN/ESL countries are however poorly represented in Europe, where only the UK and Ireland (both ENL) historically represent this kind of intimate involvement with English. In Europe, only the Northwestern countries (especially Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands) have achieved an extent of English use comparable to that in most former colonies.

Within the ESL countries a high level of use of English is virtually universal among precisely those socio-economic groups who have access to the Internet. In these countries, being educated and knowing English go hand in hand. Within most of the ENL countries, however, a privileged, highly educated position is no guarantee of access to English. Thus, in practice, the usefulness of English in the Internet places someone from a poor ESL country who has access to the Internet at a considerable advantage over someone from a much richer ENL country who does not know English or does not know it well. In national terms, the factors that matter are:

- i. High GNP / low GNP
- ii. Predominantly urban / large rural population
- iii. Extensive use of English / little use of English

The Internet was established by, and still is dominated by, that most rich and central nation, the USA. Much Internet communication is routed through US servers, as all of us outside the US are only too aware. The centre of the Internet is the US. However, access to the Internet does weaken the geographical sense of centre in a number of ways. Although accessing a site overseas may be slower than accessing a local site, there are times of day in all locations when overseas sites are as fast to access as local ones, thus equalizing the cost of access all over the world. E-mail, unlike telephone, fax, and postal mail, gives equally fast and cheap access to correspondents anywhere. In all countries, however wealthy, access to the Internet is unevenly distributed, and in those countries

which are Anglophone postcolonial, the widespread knowledge of English among those who have Internet access places them at an advantage over equivalent people in ENL countries.

The culture of the Internet is still a predominantly American one. Users of the Internet become acculturated to its norms and to a style of presentation of self and of discourse which is essentially still American. At the same time, as more Internet users from outside the US participate in the Internet, the culture of the Internet will in part be internationalized. A major factor in determining the extent to which acculturation or internationalization prevails will be the participation of users in ESL Anglophone postcolonial settings. If more people in the Anglophone countries of Africa could participate, this would be a major contribution to a balanced internationalization.

The participation of the non-Anglophone countries of Europe in the internationalization of the Internet is at present limited in part by lack of knowledge of or confidence in English. The Internet is one of a number of pressures on those countries resulting in increasing learning of English. However, in those countries English is not indigenized, it is not seen as a local possession in the way that it is in the ENL and ESL countries, in both of which English can be part of an expression of a cultural identity. Thus, participants in the Internet from EFL countries have no vested interest in re-locating the dominant American-led culture of the Internet. The knowledge of English in the ESL countries allows them to be brokers, who, along with the non-American EFL countries, could re-culturate the Internet to a more genuinely international environment.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What are the factors responsible for English as the most widely used language in the Internet?

3.2 English as Internet Language

English of the Internet, undoubtedly, Internet English appears to be up-to-date, very flexible and quite straightforward; it comprises such texts as eye-catching layout, pictures, cartoons, hypertext links, video clips and sound. Internet English is related to electronic discourse and its characteristic features: - informality, - de-capitalization, - abbreviation (eg, EOs as essential oils), - the use of capitals for emphasis, - frequent misspelling (eg, magickal, flutes made from the branches of oak wood), - omission of the subject, - cleft sentences, imperatives and - carefree punctuation. Be these peculiarities due to the efficiency of the medium or the laziness of its users, English as a Foreign Language and Second Language learners should be aware of this phenomenon and be able to

adopt this new register. It is easy, for example, to notice there is no single, agreed upon spelling for many terms related to the Internet and other electronic media, eg: *e-mail* vs *email*.

Internet English should not be neglected by teachers whose new role is to provide students with the activities presenting distinctive features of Internet English. One way to do it is by having the students analyze texts of different origin but the same topic, which could be a part of a larger project taking into consideration:

- i. Vocabulary: idioms, colloquial phrases and words, phrasal verbs, specialized terminology;
- ii. Grammar: grammatical clauses, structures and tenses,
- iii. Register: formal, informal, stylistic devices.

Nine out of ten computers connected to the Internet are located in English-speaking countries and more than 80% of all home pages on the web are written in English. More than four fifths of all international organisations use English as either their main or one of their main operating languages. At the moment no other language comes anywhere near English. The next biggest is German. But less than 5% of web home pages are in German. There is nothing about the English language which makes it particularly useful as a world language. Much more important is the economic and political power of the USA. The rise of English is all about the power of the people who speak it - first as the language of the British Empire and now, in a slightly different form, of American corporations, advertising and pop culture and of other countries worldwide. It is estimated that more than half the world population will be "competent" in English by the year 2050. But it is likely that this new form of English will be very different to the language we understand now. Experts already classify the use of English around the world in three ways:

- a. Standard American-British English - also known as SABE. This is the "native" English as used in the USA, UK, Australia and the rest of the English-speaking world.
- b. Oral and Vernacular Englishes - known as OVE. These are mixtures of English and local languages, or versions of local languages incorporating lots of English "pop" or commercial phrases. Examples include *Konglish* - an amalgam of Korean and American slang, *Singlish* and *Chinglish* (Singaporean English and Chinese English). According to experts there are "hundreds" of other examples, including *Niglish* (Nigerian English) and *Japish* (Japanese English).
- c. International Colloquial English, or ICE - a rapidly mutating "world" language based on English but borrowing large numbers

of words from other languages as well as American "street" slang and text messaging-style abbreviations and even symbols.

Some of the most far-reaching claims about English and the Internet come from David Crystal, editor of the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. Crystal says the Internet represents the biggest change in communication in the whole of human history. These are changes which are immensely bigger than those which followed the invention of the printing press. This new technology is causing a "revolution" in human communication to rank alongside the advent of human speech itself. So far we have been communicating in speech, writing and with sign language. But the internet is neither speech nor writing. It has aspects of both and represents a new form. E-mail is not merely a faster way of sending letters. It is a dialogue between two or more people happening instantly. There is no example from human history of anything like this happening before. Crystal believes that it will affect the way in which people communicate and may eventually lead to entirely new forms of communication. Online chat is also an "entirely new" type of communication. "There has never been a case where a person could pay equal attention to what thirty people are saying all at the same time.

There is speed of information on the internet. People who use chat-rooms a lot can already conduct two or three conversations simultaneously. That is completely unprecedented. The web itself is a new form. If you look at a page in a book, go away and then return to it will still be the same. A web page can change - there are all sorts of possibilities. English, as the leading language of the internet, is already changing with increasing speed. Crystal estimates that the vocabulary of ICE-type "World English" is increasing at the rate of at least 5,000 new words every year. There are attempts by the *Oxford English Dictionary* to record and codify all the new words and ways in which they are trailing way behind but they can not keep up. The fact is that the English-speaking countries have given up ownership of English. There's no turning back with the Internet as English is a world language now. A new version of the world English now becomes *Internet + English = Netglish*.

We are in the age of the Digital Word. Just as the printing press, widely used throughout Europe by 1500, changed our use of words, leading to new written forms such as the novel and the newspaper, so the computer has created change. E-mail, chat rooms, and Web pages have made words on the screen almost as common as on the printed page. We already see changes taking place, as onscreen language becomes more informal (often creating new words, such as "online"). Words get shortened: electronic mail becomes *e-mail*, which in turn becomes *email*. Note, however, that this is not new. "Today" was spelled "to-day"

in the early twentieth century. The online experience has spawned various means of conveying tone including acronyms (such as LOL for "laughing out loud" and IRL for "in real life", ASAP "as soon as possible" —as distinguished from the virtual world of cyberspace) and emoticons such as >: D for "demonic laughter" and >: P for "sticking tongue out at you."

English continues to change with influences of all kinds. There are also sounds as communication in Internet English. There are uses of 'buzzing', a particular sound made by pressing ctrl + Z made in order to alert someone on the other side of the chat. It brings someone back to consciousness in case he forgets that the other party is still online in the chat. To buzz at times results in violation of someone else's privacy. Sometimes, it is regarded as disturbance or abuse if the other party is not interested in the chatting. However, to buzz brings in fun, musicality and alertness in the internet chat. There are also uses of emoticons which combines visual and audio reactions in the internet chat. Some emoticons when used may refer to 'waving', 'goodbye', 'anger', 'laughter' and 'joke' etc. Each emoticon represents a total message signified by the moving art it represents.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

According to David Crystal, the Internet is bringing a revolution in English language use. What are these revolutionary trends?

3.3 Writing E-mails/Text Messaging

Electronic mail system (e-mail or email) is a contemporary means of world wide communication through the Internet. Unlike the normal snail mail usually through the post and which takes several days, weeks or months to arrive to the addressee, the email is the fastest means of correspondence ever invented by man after the fax system. E-mail is a paperless correspondence unlike the fax system, processed through the internet by means of internet connectivity. To be able to apply correspondence through the internet, both parties: the sender and the receiver must be connected by means of the internet. Electronic mail system is managed by the computer because the layout of the mail is already set in the system. By clicking 'reply' after reading an e-mail, a particular reply site will appear with the sender's address already placed at the destination column. One just has to type one's reply and click 'send' and the mail is sent immediately. The recipient will receive it instantly and might reply the mail immediately if he is online and where otherwise, the mail will remain in his e-mail inbox until he reads it and decide to reply or not. There are many unsolicited mails that occur frequently in people's inboxes. Sometimes, it becomes embarrassing receiving mails from unknown clients and people whom you never contacted. These mails are called 'junk mails'. Many people have been

deceived through this mail. These Internet fraudsters assume some identities and influence some gullible people who fall headlong into their skimming.

In writing e-mail, care is taken not to write too long because of some people's inability at concentrating long hours on the computer monitor. Some people believe that the rays from the monitor could affect one's sight. There are certain characteristics associated with the writing of e-mail:

- i. There is the use of ellipsis. As stated in module 3, ellipsis involves the use of expressions that have incomplete grammatical structure but are assumed to give complete meaning as the reader is expected to complete the missing words in the course of understanding the message sent. In writing e-mails, care is taken not to write in long sentences.
- ii. There are uses of short grammatical forms or abbreviations such as: 'u' for 'you', 'ur' for 'your'; '4' for 'for', '4rm' for 'from', 'hlp' for 'help', 'cos' for 'because'; 'fin' for 'find', 'con' for 'connect'; 'pro' for 'profile'; 'upd' for 'update'; 'nd' for 'and', 'asl' for 'age, sex, location' etc.
- iii. There are uses of references. The former mail to be replied is also placed at the reply page to enable the person replying have access to the mail he is replying.
- iv. The use of grammar is very concise. There are uses of simple language forms for easy understanding. There is no need for reference to dictionaries while reading e-mail
- v. The diction in e-mails is various depending on the nature of the mail to be sent or replied. It could be subtle, harsh or medial in tone.
- vi. There are occurrences of misspellings in e-mails. The writer may type wrongly because of his attempts at typing fast to beat the time for the browsing. Sometimes the misspellings are never noticed the mails are already sent in which case there would be no room for correction. The only solution here is to constantly spell-check before sending the mail, especially through the spellchecker already in the e-mail environment.

All these characteristics are common with both the e-mails and text messaging. Text message is sent through GSM phones and even through the internet. It occurs between GSM and GSM, GSM and email or email to GSM. Both GSM and email share the same linguistic characteristics in writing except that the email could contain larger mails because it contains wider space than the GSM, unless the GSM is the Blackberry type which has almost the same facility as the computer itself. Both computers and GSM phones have facilities for connecting to the Internet. Not all GSM could connect and not all computers could

connect. It all depends on the necessary installations that should foster the connectivity.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss the characteristics of email and text messaging as they relate to English language writing and other uses.

3.4 Web Surfing/Writing

The popularity of the Internet has opened the door of opportunity to many established and aspiring writers alike. This medium of communication has also given rise to the question of writing quality in the Internet age. Writers' advocates believe the Internet has led to a lower level of writing standards. While new modes of communication through the Internet are constantly advancing and changing, the issue of writing quality questions the very definition of writing in the Internet age. Whether writers are devoted to the craft or not, they are expected to be able to write well both offline as well as online, or at least recognize the difference between the two. When writing for the Web, it is the content that matters. Writing for the Web is very different from writing for print. Print today remains superior to the Web when it comes to visible space, image and type quality, and speed. Web visitors are quickly scrolling through sites seeking specific information and will not always take the time to read every word. Traditional writing techniques and standards are less of a priority, as multiple headings, bullets and lists are needed to aid scanning readers. Although reputable writers compose much of this writing, the quality can appear less than professional. Also, with the increase of tech people writing for the Web, the rules of grammar need to be put into effect.

Writers not writing for a living often find enjoyment and small payouts from Web sites seeking material to raise their sites higher in the search engine rankings. Although this is a legitimate philosophy, the writing being published on the Web can often be less than professional. This lack of professionalism distorts the line between qualified and amateur writers. Writing standards are often not the highest priority as Websites seek to drive traffic to gain advertising exposure. It seems as if readers are not as concerned about the writing quality, as long as they feel they are reading a relevant account on a particular topic.

Blog Writers

Amateur writers are often attributed as bloggers. Blogs are avenues by which to get information or opinions out into the Web for exposure. Bloggers have taken on a new wave of communication seeking to benefit all Internet users. Anyone with Internet access and a computer

can set up a Website or blog wherein to publish his/her writing. The difference between writing on a blog versus a Web site is the amount of readers, along with the credibility each receives. Though blogs are generally informal and written by individuals, marketers and advertisers have recently taken to them and use them as a tool to promote companies and receive feedback from consumers. Blogs are easy to create in the 21st Century due to the availability of templates offered on free blog Web sites. With blogs being easy to access and editable for both blog authors and readers, the contributions are virtually limitless.

Blogs and blog writing are taking on more meaning than just idle gossip between users and contributors. Educators are seeing the benefits of maintaining blogs in the classrooms as an educational tool. Teachers are able to keep an easy-to-maintain line of communication open with parents and other educators. Blogs also stimulate students to compose reflective responses to issues within an open forum.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

‘To blog’ and ‘to surf’ are closely related yet they serve different purposes. Explain the purposes with ample examples

4.0 CONCLUSION

English is clearly the dominant language of the Internet. Computers are in any case English-oriented. Netscape and Java are in English, the vocabulary of computing and of the Internet is overwhelmingly English, and most of the texts that are accessed through it are in English. The search engines are in English and are in the US. The reasons for the dominance of English are firstly historical because the Internet began in the USA, which is still the leading user of it, and the USA is an English-using nation. The norms of the Internet are established in ASCII texts, and even now texts transmitted unaltered from (for example) Francophone keyboards may produce garbage on English-favouring keyboards. To avoid this from happening, those who post, for example, French on ASCII lists must omit diacritics. Two things constrain the use of languages other than English on world-wide web documents and communications:

- the difficulty of writing languages using non-ASCII characters, and characters that have diacritics
- the desire to reach as large a readership as possible.

The first of these constraints can be overcome, though not necessarily with ease. The second constraint, however, means that most documents in languages other than English, including those in countries where

English is little used internally are mirrored by English translations. The World Wide Web is in the position of a permanent international conference, where papers are either in English or are accompanied by English translations. The role of English reflects the dominance of English in cross-national communication. While it is easy to see picture of words in a variety of fonts and scripts, using them in an intuitive and natural way in the context of the Internet becomes an altogether more challenging problem.

One topic, however, does not appear to have a compellingly obvious localization solution in this multi-lingual environment, and that is the *Domain Name System* (DNS). The subtle difference here is that the DNS is the glue that binds all users' language symbols together and performing localized adaptations to suit local language use needs is not enough. What we need is a means to allow all of these language symbols to be used within the same system, or internationalization. The DNS is the most prevalent means of initiating a network transaction, whether it's a torrent session, the web, email, or any other form of network activity. But the DNS name string is not just an arbitrary string of characters. What you find in the DNS is most often a sequence of words or their abbreviations, and the words are generally English words, using characters drawn from a subset of the Latin character set. Thus, English is the predetermined language of the Internet.

5.0 SUMMARY

The World Wide Web is now the dominant means of transferring information in this contemporary age. The old means of information transfer is giving way to the internet. English language is the most widely used language of the internet. Since America is the initiator and dominant user of Internet and English is the language of the Americans, it means that every internet transaction must have more than 70% English in its usage. Thus, the users of English will have more advantage using the internet. Those who are limited in the use of English will find the internet very uninteresting because of the language constraints. E-mails and the other forms of communication like web mails, Internet chat, group mails, webcam, blogging etc have become a part of the world's communication means since the late 1990s and most businesses are now transacted through the Internet. Writing in the internet has become very lucrative. Those who engage in blogging are paid because they surf the net, write important research and are paid for the job. In most offices, information is routed through interconnectivity thereby making most offices paperless.

Writing emails and other forms of internet writings is very systematic. For those with little education, it becomes necessary to teach them English and the basic computer skills to enable them work with the

internet. The internet is the fastest means of writing, communication, enculturation and transmission of values. Today, there are many web professionals who live by writing through the internet. Businesses like forex trading, stock trading, bond trading, transfer of funds and other financial transactions are now faster, easier and simpler through the internet procedure.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions carefully:

- i. Explain the origin and functions of the internet.
- ii. English language is regarded as the most widely used language in the internet. Discuss how this came to be since Chinese is the largest spoken language on earth.
- iii. Emails are written in specialized forms. Explain the processes for writing correspondence through e-mails.
- iv. Distinguish between web surfing and web blogging. Give adequate explanations in your answer.
- v. Write brief notes on the following internet activities in relation with English usage: (i) Group mails (ii) Web cams (iii) Internet chat (iv) DNS.

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