
CHANGES & TENDENCIES IN CONTEMPORARY NATIVE ENGLISH

E.N. Elina

Siberian Federal University
Center for International Education
Svobodny av., 79, Krasnoyarsk, Russia, 660041

P.J. Tibbenham

Krasnoyarsk State Pedagogical University
Ada Lebedeva str., 89, Krasnoyarsk, Russia, 660049

This paper looks at such complex areas in English lexicology as lexical differences between spoken English among native speakers and that of learners of English, core lexis for learners to be mastered and: more specifically, neologisms, words in vogue and colloquialisms.

Key words: «Real English», English as a Foreign Language, style, formal, informal, spoken (colloquial), neologisms, neological boom, buzz words, colloquialisms.

This paper is devoted to such complex areas in English lexicology as the division of English language into model and target languages, lexical differences between spoken (colloquial, informal) English among native speakers and that of learners of English, and core lexis for learners of English to be mastered. More specifically, new words (neologisms), words in vogue and colloquialisms which are commonly encountered in the English language are looked at in this article.

The target readers of the paper are teachers of English, students of foreign languages faculties, and those who require or would like to know more than the average learner of English.

There is a tendency in modern lexicology to distinguish between real English (RE) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) [5. P. 158]. In other words, RE is the model language to which the learners are exposed as «good sample», and EFL is the target language, i.e. what the learners themselves are expected to produce. However, targets may change during a learner's period of study, and moreover, the native speaker as productive ability is rarely the target: it is the goal for only a small percentage of learners. It is evident that at best, the vast number of learners will not improve beyond intermediate throughout their lives, and are seemingly both happy with this and derive enormous benefits from their albeit practical mastery of English. This is in spite of the fact that there are ever-expanding opportunities (in particular electronic media) to see and hear the 'real thing' (RE) and it has increasingly become available to the teachers of English and learners (especially over the last decade in Siberia and also in Russia and elsewhere in the world in general). Yet at times, this may appear more of a disadvantage than a benefit. Hence, the question arises: «Is EFL in any fundamental way different from RE? The answer is undoubtedly „yes“, and to many teachers of English and learners this perhaps comes as a surprise [5. P. 184—185]. They are «worlds apart»: different grammar, lexis, phonetics etc. Although it should be noted that most teachers/learners of English

consciously and sub-consciously self-censor the English language they encounter and choose to remember, they rarely use many lexical items (e.g. dialect words, colloquialism, teen-speak, swear words, slang) of RE, even if they might recognize them, because they are not properly taught how to use them.

In our opinion, adequate language exposure means that a learner can more often select from a number of different ways of «saying the same thing» and know ways of choosing what is appropriate and suitable in a particular speech situation and social circumstances.

We think that teachers have the responsibility to advise on the suitability or opportunities of particular expressions for learners needs to help them acquire «near-native ability when and where learners actually use the language they were taught» [6. P. 138].

With the rapid development and modernization of electronic means of communication, the 21st century has given rise and has brought to the surface of British social life new words and phrases and new meanings to old ones. These are commonly called neologisms.

In Webster's Encyclopaedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English language, we read that 'neologism' is a new word usage, or phrase; the introduction or use of new words or new senses of words [10. P. 958]. This process has received the name 'neological boom' [1. P. 16]. These words have come into active usage over the last 20—25 years. Many of them are completely new to native speakers as well as to Russian learners.

Dictionaries in general, as well as of the English language tend to lag behind the rapid changes in vocabulary and are simply unable to register all new words, and this can lead to misunderstanding of both spoken and written discourse of the native speakers by the learners of English. Two fundamental principles lay the foundation for our choice of new words in the present article: their topicality and frequency of the occurrence [1. P. 16—19]. Many of them have been registered in the latest versions of dictionaries, some by TV corporations such as the BBC, while the usage of the others is (at the time of writing) restricted to a particular area (e.g. London). We viewed more than 200 hundred hours of TV programmes, video and DVD, looked through more than 150 newspapers, and a dozen dictionaries. They include:

— agony aunt — normally in a newspaper or a magazine, but also on television, an agony aunt provides advice to people who write to them about their personal problems. The male version, agony uncle, also exists albeit rarer;

— pay-as-you-go — if you have a mobile phone, you can pay for your calls on a monthly contract or «pay as you go», i.e. only paying for calls as you make them;

— ready meal — a meal already prepared which just requires heating up in the oven or in the microwave;

— to skive — to play truant, or to «call in sick», i.e. not go to school, a class, or work with no good reason;

— a skiver is someone who skives;

— to swig — to take a quick drink or gulp of something;

— upgrade (verb and noun) — to make a machine, e.g. a computer, more powerful or efficient; to improve conditions, standards, e.g. to obtain a better seat on a plane, or a better room in a hotel;

— uptight — angry and anxious about something;

— whiz kid — someone who is young, successful, and very good at what they do;

— wow-factor — something that makes you pleasantly surprised (it makes you say ‘wow’!). It could be used for anything from a car to an advert on television;

— last-minute — at the very last moment, the latest possible time something is possible, e.g. a last-minute goal, last minute shopping, last minute plane ticket;

— whip-round — to do a whip-round is to collect money from a group of people, for example, to buy a joint present for somebody;

— water cooler chat — a water cooler is where people get water to drink in an office. Chat is an informal talk. So, water cooler chat is an informal talk in the office around the water cooler;

— air rage — losing one’s temper and becoming angry and violent on a plane. Cf. road rage, becoming angry and violent due to someone else’s dangerous driving;

— bloke — an informal word for a man, similar to ‘guy’.

— bottom line — often used in business English, and has two meanings: 1) it can mean the most important thing in a discussion, e.g. in a meeting you might hear ‘The bottom line is that we need more staff’; 2) in a negation, it might be the lowest amount of money that someone will accept, e.g. ‘I can go no lower than £2000. That’s my bottom line’;

— to face the music — an idiom that means to accept punishment when you have done something wrong, or not done something that should have been;

— globalization — often used in business English to talk about businesses or companies that operate or plan to operate all over the world;

— gobsmacked — literally it does mean to be hit in the mouth, but as a word is really used to indicate such a surprise about something so that you do not know what to say;

— grub — literally a maggot, it is more frequently slang or an informal word for food;

— himbo — a good-looking man who uses his looks to succeed or get what he wants. However, a himbo is usually superficial and unintelligent. Cf. bimbo and metrosexual;

— jet lag — has only existed since people started to fly long distances regularly. It is the phenomenon of being tired or having disoriented sleep patterns after a long plane journey, particularly when there is a large difference in time zones between the place of departure and destination. Jet lag, incidentally, is worse on the ‘red eyes’ i.e. night time flights travelling west to east over several hours;

— motor — an informal word for car. ‘John’s got himself a new motor!’;

— penny-pinching — mean, stingy, not wanting to spend money;

— to rip off — to cheat someone, to make someone pay too much for something. It can also be a noun, so, you might say, ‘Don’t go to see that film. It’s a rip off’;

— shades — literally blinds, they now usually mean sunglasses;

— top of the range — the most expensive or best out of a group of similar products, e.g. ‘I have a top of the range BMW’;

— video diary — whereas a diary is a book in which you might write down your thoughts, a video diary is the same thing, but you film yourself instead;

— barney — a noisy argument: to have a barney is, therefore, to have a noisy argument;

— big-headed — arrogant, e.g. ‘I do not like him. He’s really big-headed’;

— blast from the past — someone who or something that reminds you of someone or something you’d forgotten;

— booze — a slang word meaning alcohol, or its verb form meaning to drink alcohol. A boozer can either be a person who boozes regularly or heavily, or an establishment where drinking takes place;

— sandwich course — one year in a (usually, although not exclusively) university course spent working for a company or in industry, or spent studying abroad for experience;

— soccer mom — in Britain ‘mum’ is used to mean mother, but in America, it is pronounced ‘mom’. A soccer mom is an American mother who lives in the suburbs and spends a lot of her time taking her children to their sports activities etc, but the term is now also used in the UK;

— to chill out — to relax, calm down or take it easy;

— wiki — a website that anyone can edit or modify. It usually contains information, and anyone can add or change the information, e.g. wikipedia.

Fashion is a very unpredictable and usually ephemeral phenomenon (today you are a star, tomorrow nobody can remember who you are). The same happens to buzz words (words in vogue). Buzz words become or have already become worn out and emptied of their initial meaning by over frequent and careless use. They are too widespread, and as a result, are very well-embedded in the fabric of the language. Some of them are “modish and inflated diction clichés” [11. P. 228—229] which are a rough and ready way of referring to a body of words and phrases that are familiar, but hard to delineate and delimit. In origin, some of these words are often scientific or technical; others are the creation of popular writers and broadcasters, some of them are the product of electronic communication. As their popularity increases, so their real denotative usage/value drains away, which can almost be compared to the process of monetary inflation. Here are some examples of buzz-words:

— blog — abridgment of ‘web log’, a website usually maintained by an individual, with regular comments, descriptions or pictures and video of events;

— to blog — to add comments or material to a blog;

— blogger — someone who writes blogs;

— a must have, must haves — something that you need (but probably never knew it);

— to log on (into)/off (out) — to start work (enter)/finish (exit);

— nang — brilliant, super;

— gimmick — gadget; (advertising/promotional trick);

— (to) boost — (to provide) great support, encouragement.

To use a language properly, we ideally ought to be aware of what forms of language are appropriate for a given situation, or as Geoffrey put it ‘variety labels’ (formal, informal, polite and etc...) which are reminders that the English language is not a single one, but many languages, each of which belong to a particular social situation or geographical area. The English used in formal communication is in some ways different from the English used in informal conversations. The English of speech tends to be different from the English of writing in several ways [2. P. 211, 12]. This kind of language variation is called style. By style in this paper, we mean the relative degree of formality that characterized a speaker language as influenced by the location, occasion, social status, relationship with others [7. P. 99].

Martin Joos has cut this range of language variation into 5 ‘slices’: *frozen* (the most careful and elegant variety, reserved for very important as symbolic moments), *formal* (generally serious level of language use), *consultative* (the plain everyday style), *casual* (normal, relaxed style, appropriate to conversations with friends), *intimate* (grammatically and phonologically reduced style used with the closest friends and family) [8. P. 29—35] (our formatting)]. Consultative, casual and intimate are the real varieties of informal (colloquial) speech style. The question arises: “What styles should be referred to spoken speech?” Russian linguist Fajenova proposed making a distinction between spoken English for native speakers which embraces consultative, casual and intimate styles, and spoken English for the Russian learners of English which covers only two styles: consultative and casual. She believes that the intimate style for the learning purposes is not suitable because it could be applied in a limited number of social situations by Russian learners of English [4. P. 27—34].

We presume that Russian learners have the choice to acquainted themselves with the situations of intimate style in order to enlarge their general language competence.

Informal (colloquial) language is the language of private conversation [2. P. 11—12]. It is the first type of language that a native speaking child becomes familiar with. Nowadays, public communication of a popular kind, e.g. advertisement, newspapers or a lecture-reading style, occasionally called coffee-talk style, employ a colloquial manner.

In English there are many differences of vocabulary between formal and colloquial language. Colloquial language is characterized by a number of peculiarities: colloquialisms, clipped words, slang, emotionally coloured words, words of general meaning (office, business), verbs with postpositional elements (to get off, to put down), nouns with prepositions (see David Crystal) (bag of, heaps of), lexical imprecision, vagueness (words with suffix *-ish*, word combinations like ...sort of...). The speaker pays little attention, if any, to the form of the expression of his thoughts. His speech is less accurate (controlled) than written discourse. These peculiarities are considered by linguists to be the norm, because they occur in ordinary language situations which are proved by numerous language practices. This variety of language is a widely spoken variety in English-speaking countries.

We are of the opinion that learners of English, on the one hand, should be acquainted with colloquialisms which are commonly encountered in various social situations and, on the other hand, their level of English should not be an obstacle in using

these vocabulary items. The following colloquialisms are frequently used in every day conversations and situations:

- to dump smb = to chuck smb — to get rid of one's boyfriend/girlfriend;
- to have one's say — to voice one's opinion;
- to dawn on smb — to occur to smb;
- to leave smb with a cliff hanger — to leave someone anticipating something, unknown/exciting;
- tad — a little bit;
- dodgy — possibly illegal or dangerous;
- posse — a group of people;
- tatty — cheap and nasty;
- smirting — since smoking has been banned in public places in the UK, people go outside to 'smoke and flirt' = smirt;
- binge drinking — drinking large amounts of alcohol in one session;
- ladette culture — (young) females behaving like young men (from the English word *lad*, meaning a boy) Cf. chav;
- chav — originally southern English, informal and dismissive: a young working-class person who dresses in casual sports clothes, often poorly educated and uncouth;
- off the rails — degenerate;
- to score — to obtain drugs;
- bendy bus — a long bus which bends (stretches) in the middle;
- it's in the bag — it's going to happen;
- it's touch and go — the result is uncertain;
- it's all up in the air — nothing's been sorted it out;
- don't get your knickers in a twist — do not get upset;
- don't get shirty with me — do not get angry with me;
- I've got smth up my sleeve — I've got a surprise/plan;
- to speak off the cuff — to speak unprepared;
- I'll collar him — I'll catch him;
- red tops — low class tabloid newspapers with their titles printed in red ink: The Sun, The Mirror and their Sunday equivalents, News of the World and The People) (Cf. yellow press; broadsheets/quality newspapers);
- bar/pub crawling — visiting several bars/pubs in succession;
- to feel the pinch — to lose money; to not make enough money;
- to feel the crunch — to lose a lot of money; to owe a lot of money;
- fat cat — rich person; sponsor of a political party;
- to gate crash — to arrive at a party uninvited;
- a do — party (we're having a do; a big do; a bit of a do);
- hunk — pin-up model, an attractive, cool, young man;
- to have a fling — an affair;
- fry-up — usually, but not exclusively, bacon and eggs in the morning;
- drivel — rubbish, nonsense, tosh;

- to flick — through the papers, but around the channels;
- (bacon) butty/butties — sandwiches;
- hour glass figure — model like figure;
- to be a flash in the pan — be very popular for a short time;
- tycoon — financial or industrial baron;
- to earn smb's keep — to earn enough money to support oneself;
- a cash cow — product in demand; reliable supplier of money;
- gravy train — profitable business;
- it's blowing a gale — it's extremely windy;
- it's bucketing down — it's raining heavily;
- it's pelting down — it's raining heavily;
- it's blistering hot — it's extremely hot;
- it's roasting — it's extremely hot;
- to be drenched — to be soaked to the skin

Note that the last six are all connected to the topic of weather.

Interjections and opinion indicators deserve a particular mention:

- tell me about it — I already know it;
- join the club — I/we have the same problems;
- to take the words out of someone's mouth — to say something someone else was about to say;
- now you are talking — now I agree with you;
- you're telling me! — I know;
- to get one's goat — to annoy somebody intensely.

We would like readers to note application of English slang by the learners in communication in this paper as well. By slang is meant in this paper words, phrases, commonly used in talk among friends or colleagues, but not suitable for formal occasions and good writing. It is a secret language shared by the people in the same social subgroups ("computer slang, sports slang, students' slang and etc"). As is clear slang is not used by the majority of people. Some slang words and phrases may even sound very vulgar and offensive. Some of the above mentioned neologisms and colloquialisms might be referred to slang domain. Though quite a few of them have entered the informal spoken discourse, the usage of them is restricted by some factors (social groups and situations). Both the learners and teachers of English should be very watchful about slang. Before memorizing the tricky and mellifluously sounded slang expressions they should 'give a thought' about the consequences. Sometimes however transparent and innocent is a slang word or a phrase there is always a hidden peril which awaits you 'around the corner' (behind the phrase or the word). Let's look at the phrase: hit the fan which means serious trouble, produce scandalous results: e.g. The company wasn't doing very well, to put it mildly, but when the best advertising specialists quit the job, it really hit the fan. She really hit the fan with her pink dress at the funeral.

The slang phrase and the sentences sound OK at first glance. But it's not that simple.

The full expression is 'the shit hits the fan' and the origin of it is probably a joke: somebody used a hole in the floor instead of the toilet, and the hole was above the

running fan in the bar downstairs. Now you can imagine what impression you might produce on your interlocutors.

To sum up the more learners of English get to know lexical items (slang included), the more their vocabulary is widen. When choosing a slang word, phrase or colloquialisms for an active use *common sense* based on reliable reference sources, frequent usage should be a starring guide for the learners and teachers of English.

An article of this size cannot pretend to embrace many of the new or recently changed vocabulary items in contemporary English, but those which have been mentioned were verified by native speaker informants in London, Oxford and elsewhere and were considered as typical examples of RE.

We are certain that there are other categories of neologisms which can be included in this article, but in any case, we hope that this paper has provided an insight to help to increase the lexical competence of the learners of English.

REFERENCES

- [1] *Zabotkina V.I.* New Lexis of Modern English. — Moscow: The High School, 1989. — P. 16—19.
- [2] *Leech D., Svartvik.* Communicative Grammar of English. — London, 1988. — P. 11—12.
- [3] *Trofimova Z.S.* Dictionary of New Words and Meanings. — Moscow, 1993. — P. 284.
- [4] *Fajenova M.O.* Teaching of Communicative Culture in English. — Moscow: The High School, 1991. — P. 7—19; P. 27—34.
- [5] *Lewis M.* Implementing the Lexical Approach. — Thompson Heinle, 2002. — P. 188; P. 184—185.
- [6] *Lewis M.* Teaching Collocations. — Thompson Heinle, 2000. — P. 138.
- [7] *Redman S.* English Vocabulary in Use. — Cambridge University Press, 1997. — P. 99.
- [8] *Preston D.R., Shuy R.W.* Varieties of American English. — Information Agency, Washington, D.C, 1988. — P. 29—35.
- [9] Real English. — BBC, 2007. — P. 16—58.
- [10] Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language. — Portland House, New York, 1989. — P. 958.
- [11] ABBYY Lingvo 12 Английская версия.
- [12] <http://usefulenglish.ru/idioms/standard-slang-common-sense-and-good-reference-materials>
- [13] *Weiner E.S.C.* The Oxford Miniguide to English Usage. — Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. — P. 228—229.
- [14] The Sun. — 24.11.07. — P. 3—11; P. 19.
- [15] The People. — 18.11.07. — P. 1, 3, 9, 13.
- [16] The Times. — 26.11.07.
- [17] The Independent. — 26.11.07.
- [18] The Lite. — London. — 3.12.07.
- [19] The Daily Telegraph. — 3.12.07.
- [20] Daily Mirror. — 26.11.07. — P. 7.
- [21] The Guardian. — 20.11.07.
- [22] The Sunday Times. — 18.10.07.
- [23] Daily Express. — 26.10.07. — P. 2.
- [24] Daily Mail. D. — 3.12.07.
- [25] Daily Mail 'Weekend' Section. — 3.12.07.

ИЗМЕНЕНИЯ И ТЕНДЕНЦИИ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

Е.Н. Елина

Сибирский федеральный университет
Центр международного образования
Свободный пр., 79, Красноярск, Россия, 660041

П.Дж. Тиббенхам

Красноярский государственный педагогический университет
ул. А. Лебедевой, 89, Красноярск, Россия, 660049

Рассмотрены такие области английской лексикологии, как неологизмы, коллоквиализмы и фэшн слова, а также различия между стилями английского языка и английским для носителей и английским для иностранцев.

Ключевые слова: «реальный английский», английский язык как иностранный, стиль, формальный, неофициальный, разговорный, фэшн слова, неологизмы, современные коллоквиализмы.