Lecture 7

Word-Building

I. Types of Word-Building

Word-building is one of the main ways of enriching vocabulary. There are four main ways of word-building in Modern English: affixation, composition, conversion, shortening. There are also secondary ways of word-building: sound-interchange, stress interchange, sound imitation, blends, back formation (disaffixation).

Sound-interchange is the way of word-building when some sounds are

changed to form a new word, e.g. to strike – stroke, to sing – song.

Stress interchange can be mostly met in verbs and nouns of Romanic origin:

nouns have the stress on the first syllable and verbs on the last syllable, e.g. accent – to accent.

Sound imitation is the way of word-building when a word is built by

imitating different sounds:

a) sounds produced by human beings: to whisper, to mumble;

b) sounds produced by animals, birds, insects: to moo, to hiss, to buzz;

c) sounds produced by nature and objects: to splash, to bubble, to clatter.

Blends are words formed from a word-group or two synonyms, e.g. hustle

(hurry and bustle), cinemaddict (cinema addict).

Backformation (disaffixation) is the way of word-building when a word is formed by dropping the final morpheme to form a new word, e.g. to bach (from bachelor), to televise (from television). The part-of-speech meaning of the primary word is changed, verbs are formed from nouns.

II. Affixation

Affixation has been one of the most productive ways of word-building

throughout the history of English. It consists in adding an affix to the stem of a definite part of speech. Affixation is divided into suffixation and prefixation.

III. Suffixation

The main function of suffixes in Modern English is to form one part of

speech from another, the secondary function is to change the lexical meaning of the same part of speech, e.g. educate v – educatee n.

There are different classifications of suffixes.

1. Part-of-speech classification. Suffixes which can form different parts of speech are given here:

a) noun-forming suffixes: -er criticize, -ism ageism;

b) adjective-forming suffixes: –able breathable, -less symptomless, -ous prestigious;

c) adverb-forming suffixes: -ly singly, -ward tableward, -wise jet-wise;

d) numeral-forming suffixes: -teen sixteen, -ty seventy, -fold twofold.

2. Semantic classification. Suffixes changing the lexical meaning of the stem can be subdivided into groups, e.g. noun-forming suffixes can denote:

a) the agent of the action: -er teacher, -ist taxist, -ent student;

b) nationality: –ian Russian, -ese Japanese, -ish English.

c) collectivity: -dom kingdom, -ry peasantry, -ship readership;

d) diminutiveness: -ie horsie, -let booklet, -ette kitchenette,

e) quality: -ness copelessness, -ity answerability;

f) feminine gender: -ess actress, -ine heroine, -ette cosmonette;

g) abstract notion: -hood childhood, -ness politeness, -ence/ance tolerance;

h) derogatory meaning: -ard drunkard, -ster gangster.

3. Lexico-grammatical character of the stem. Suffixes added to certain

groups of stems are subdivided into:

a) suffixes added to verbal stems: -er commuter, -ing suffering;

b) suffixes added to noun stems: -less smogless, -ism adventurism;

c) suffixes adde to adjective stems: -en weaken, -ish longish.

4. Origin of suffixes.

a) native (Germanic) suffixes: -er teacher, -ful careful, -less painless, -ly swiftly, -dom, -ed, -en, -hood, -ing, -ish, -ness, -ship, -teen, -ty, -ward;

b) Romanic suffixes: -tion attention, -ment development, -able/-ible

terrible, moveable, -age, -ard, ance/ence, -ate;

c) Greek suffixes: -ist taxist, -ism capitalism, -ize organize;

d) Russian suffixes: -nik filmnik.

5. Productivity of suffixes:

a) productive: -er dancer, -ize specialize, -ly wetly, -ness closeness;

b) semi-productive: -ette kitchenette, -ward sky-ward;

c) non-productive: -ard drunkard, -th length.

6. Structure.

a) simple: -er speaker, -ist taxist;

b) compound –ical, ironical, -ation formation, -manship sportsmanship,

ably/ibly terribly, reasonably.

IV. Prefixation

Prefixation is the formation of words by means of adding a prefix to the stem. In English it is characteristic for forming verbs. The main function of prefixes in English is to change the lexical meaning of the same part of speech, e.g. happy- unhappy, head – overhead. Prefixes can be classified according to different principles:

1. Semantic classification:

a) negative prefixes, e.g. in-, un- invaluable, unhappy;

b) prefixes denoting repetition or reversative actions: de-, re-, dis- decolonize, revegetation, disconnect;

c) prefixes denoting time, space, degree relations: inter-, hyper-, ex-, pre-, over- interplanetary, hypertension, ex-student, preelection, overdrugging.

2. Origin of prefixes:

a) native (Germanic): un-, over-, under- unhappy, overfeed, undernourish;

b) Romanic: in-, de-, ex-, re- inactive, ex-student, rewrite;

c) Greek: sym- sympathy, hyper- hypertension.

3. The function of prefixes. According to their function prefixesmay be convertive and non-convertive:

a) convertive prefixes transfer derivatives to a different part of speech in

comparison with their original stem: em-, de- bronze – to embronze, bus – to debus;

b) non-convertive prefixes: dis-, under-, un- to agree - to disagree, to go – to undergo, easy – uneasy.

4. Stylistic value:

a) stylistically neutral: un-, over-, re- unnatural, oversee, resell;

b) literary-bookish: ultra- ultra-viole, bi- bifocal;

5. The grammatical type of the stem prefixes combine with:

a) deverbal: re- rewrite, over- overdo, out- outstay;

b) denominal: ex- ex-wife, un- unbutton, de- detrain;

c) deadjectival: in- inactive, un- uneasy, bi- annual.