

Etymological eye-openers

Abstract

Etymology seeks the source of words. In the following I offer a sample of some unexpected sources of our vocabulary. This mixed bag of the many different sources of our words indicates the inherently creative nature of language: The estimate of 170,000 to 230,000 English words is bound to grow.

Keywords: *etymology; toponyms; eponyms.*

The inevitability of change has been recognized throughout the ages: Heraclitus, Spenser, Yeats have all commented on it. A 17th century poet expressed it thus: "Since 'tis Nature's Law to change, / Constancy alone is strange" (John Wilmot in Doody, 1985, p. 146). Along with other physical and social phenomena, language similarly undergoes a constant process of change. In an essay on two opposing functions of language the Hebrew poet Bialik (1915/2008), freely borrowing from the Russian-Ukrainian linguist Alexander Potebnya (see Lapidus, 2001), commented on the fate of words: "Words rise to greatness and words fall and become profane". He also hypothesized about the reasons for such changes: "Thus a word or a system falls from its greatness and lets another one take its place not because it has lost its power to reveal, to illuminate, ... but rather to the contrary: because the word or system has been worn thin by too much kneading and groping and scratching, and it won't conceal or hide anymore..."

In this essay I am interested in the direction of change. Some languages become gradually extinct: According to Lewis, Simons, & Fennig (2013) 421 of 6909 living languages are endangered. Wilford (2007) concluded that in less than one hundred years, nearly half of the languages known today will be lost forever. Other tongues change in the opposite direction: new words are being constantly added to them. Neither process has been satisfactorily explained (though, see Bradley, 2000). In the following I offer two mechanisms for the latter direction, clearly attested in English: the use of toponyms and eponyms; see also Moore, 2011 for a similar process in the use of numeronyms. These, as well as additional methods,

not treated in this essay, will demonstrate the ability of language users to expand their currently available vocabulary in order to fill perceived gaps.

In the following sample of these unexpected sources of our vocabulary I've added explanations only for non-obvious words and/or sources. Uncertain derivations have been so marked.

1) Geographical sources or toponyms

Many of the following started out as adjectives, or had an adjectival function, then lost the nouns following them.

Edibles: Danish, frankfurter (franks...), hamburger, (and all the burgers derived from it), baloney from Bologna in Italy, wiener (hot dog) named after Vienna, sardines said to be named after Mediterranean island of Sardinia, parmesan from Parma, tabasco from Mexican state (though produced in Louisiana). Roquefort is aged in the Combalou caves of Roquefort-sur-Soulzon in France, gorgonzola from eponymous district of Milan, liptauer from Liptov in Slovakia, limburger (cheese, as well as limburgite, a semi glassy rock) from a Belgian province, mayonnaise from Mahon in Minorca, scallions and shallots received their name from Ashkelon, once a Philistine, now an Israeli city. Stroganoff (beef dish), after Russian minister Alexander Stroganoff, d 1891, Chateaubriand (steak), after French statesman François-René, vicomte de Chateaubriand, d 1848, sandwich, Napoleon and Josephine (both cakes, the former also a coin, a card game, a boot and a cypress).

Drinks: burgundy, champagne, cognac, armagnac, tokay, scotch, daiquiri (a cocktail) from Cuban district, port from Portuguese city Porto, tequila from Mexican town in State of Jalisco, java (slang for coffee and the inspiration for the name of a programming language). Bourbon from Bourbon, Kentucky, from the royal family name, but ultimately from Borvo, a Celtic god.

Dances and music: Marseillaise, allemande, charleston, polonaise, krakowiak or cracovienne. Pavan from Padua, mazurka from Mazur in Southeast Prussia, polka from Czech word meaning Polish woman (though it denotes a Bohemian dance; see also polka dot from same source).

Other: balkanize, finlandize, lebanonize, turquoise, arabesque, sodomize and sodomy, crepe de chine, damask, grenadine (silk textile) from Granada, Spain. Holland (a fabric, as well the name of about twenty American towns), angora after Ancara, lombard from Lombardy in Italy, italics from Italy, the Olympics and the given name Olympia come from Mt. Olympus. Laconic from Laconia in ancient Greece, sardonic from Sardinia, limerick perhaps from

eponymous Irish city, jerseys named after one of the Channel Islands, worsted (a fabric) from Worstead in Norfolk, balaclava after site of an 1854 battle in the Crimean war. Cravat from Croatia, muslin after Mosul in Iraq, ulster (a long overcoat) carries the name of an Irish province, macassar (a kind of hair oil) from Mangkasara on island of Celebes, faience (glazed earthenware) from Faenza, Italy, the element Polonium in honor of Mme. Curie's nationality, Mirzapur (carpet) from Indian town. Badminton from eponymous Gloucestershire estate (itself from Beadumund, a personal name), dum-dum (bullets) from Dum Dum, arsenal near Calcutta, India; bren (light machine gun) from the Czech city Brno, hackney and hack from the name of a horse breeding place in London. Japonica (a plant, a butterfly, and a rice variety), manila (envelopes), indigo from India, Marathon, tartar from Tatar, cajun (e. g. cooking) from Canadian or from Arcadia, now Nova Scotia. Dollar from Joachimsthal, where they first coined talers, rugby after Rugby School in England, meander comes from the river Menderes in Turkey, havana (cigar), malacca (cane) named after Malaysian state, cayenne (pepper) perhaps from Cayenne in French Guiana, Chihuahua is named after the state of Chihuahua in Mexico, spaniel, philistine, landau (carriage) from German town, magnet from Magnes, an ancient city in Asia Minor.

2) Proper names or eponyms

Some of the following examples have metonymic properties.

First, some geographical locations based on proper names: Cincinnati (city in Ohio, named after Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, Roman dictator), America, Rome, Tasmania, Constantinople (now Istanbul), Valletta (Malta's capital), named after Jean Parisot de la Valette, Washington, Lincoln (both town and car), Columbus (and some 20 more American cities, as well as Columbia, S. America) honor Christopher Columbus. Caesarea, Tiberias, and Herzlia (three towns in Israel), St. Petersburg (later Leningrad, then again St. Petersburg since 1991), Stalingrad, Ho-chi-min City, Solon (city in Ohio, after Athenian sage), Canadian province Alberta, along with Lake Louise and Mount Alberta, were named after Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, d 1939. Bolivia after S. Bolivar, Bismarck, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Rhodesia, Philippines, while Jersey may be a corruption of Latin Caesarea. To illustrate the practical inexhaustibility of this list, I have searched the Comprehensive Atlas of the World (The Times, 2014) and found about 4500 geographical items named after saints (St., San, Santa, Sao, etc.).

The sciences: Nickel (the element & later the coin) after Nikolaus (given name, related to Old Nick), Mercury, Uranium from the Greek god, father of the Titans Ouranos, Plutonium, Germanium, Scandium, Gallium (the last not after the country, but rather its discoverer whose name means 'cock'), the element Americium ultimately from Amerigo Vespucci. The

element Tantalum, as well as tantalize and tantalus (decanter) after Tantalus from Greek mythology, hertz (unit of frequency of electromagnetic waves) after German physicist Heinrich Hertz, d 1894, ampere was named after French mathematician and physicist André Ampère, d 1836, watt (James Watt, Scottish inventor, d 1819), volt after Italian physicist Alessandro Volta, d 1827, ohm (unit of electrical resistance), carries the name of Georg Ohm, German physicist, d 1854, joule (unit of energy) named after the English physicist James Joule, d 1889), petri (dish) after Julius Petri, German bacteriologist, d 1921. Bunsen burner named after German chemist Robert Bunsen, d 1899, torr (a unit of pressure), from Evangelista Torricelli, d 1647, the bel in decibel comes from Alexander Bell, curie (measure of radiation) after Mme Curie, maxwell (unit measuring magnetic flux) after Scottish scientist James Maxwell, d 1879, the programming language pascal is named in honor of the French mathematician Blaise Pascal. Gauss -- unit for magnetic field, along with some twenty other objects and events -- was named in honor of German mathematician Johann Gauss, d 1855, weber (unit of magnetic flux) was named after German physicist Wilhelm Weber, d 1891, galvanize after Luigi Galvani, Italian physicist d 1798. Several medical conditions have been named after individuals, such as Parkinson, Wolf-Parkinson-White, Hotchkins, Alzheimer, Tourette, Asperger's, sadism, masochism, mesmerism (cf. Moore, 2002).

The Hebrew Bible: Israel from the name won by the patriarch Jacob ("fought with God"), (anti-) Semitic from Adam's son Shem, to raise Cain, Methuselah (very old man), Ishmaelite, Mosaic (faith, but not mosaic as an art form which comes from Muse) from Moses, Jew from Jacob's son Yehuda, onanism (from Onan in Genesis 38:9). Joshua tree and park perhaps named after Biblical Joshua, Samsonite, Solomonite, David's Shield, jezebel named after Ahab's wife (I Kings 21), Jeremiad, Aaron's Rod (a plant), Beelzebub. As measures of champagne: Nebuchadnezzar 15000ml, Balthazar 12000ml, Salmanazar 9000ml, Methuselah 6000ml. Bedlam from biblical city of Bethlehem, but the name probably means "House of Lahmu and Lahamu," two Mesopotamian deities.

Mythological gods and figures have contributed their share, too: Jovial, Junoesque, Adonis, Martial, Herculean; money and mint derive from Moneta, one of Juno's names. Athens received its name from the goddess Athena, Pan, the Arcadian shepherd god, provides the source of panic. Hermaphrodite combines Hermes and Aphrodite; term, terminal and hermetic also derive from Hermes. January from Janus, March from Mars, Wednesday belongs to Woden, Thursday, thunder, and the element Thorium come from the god Thor. Titanic and the element Titanium from the Titans, Palladium from Pallas Athena. Atlas (inc. Mountains), geo (-logy,-metry,-graphy) derive from the Greek earth goddess Gaia, siren, cereal from Ceres, volcano and to vulcanize from the god Vulcan. Saturnine (sluggish, gloomy), as well as saturnic (affected with lead-poisoning), the planet Saturn, and Saturday,

all named for the god Saturn, ocean from Oceanus, son of Gaia, Iris and iridescent, both from the goddess of the rainbow. Erotic comes from Eros, echo from the eponymous mountain nymph, narcissism from Narkissos, a beautiful youth in Ovid's metamorphoses, bacchanalia from Bacchus, aurora carries the name of the Roman goddess of dawn, academy from the Greek hero Academus, hyacinth after Laconian youth Hyakinthos, hector after a Trojan hero, calypso (a style of Afro-Caribbean music) after a nymph in the Odyssey.

Some adjectives, (and later, nouns) based on famous persons or fictional literary characters: Platonic, Socratic, Pauline, Victorian, Machiavellian, Raphaelite, Hussite, Jacobean, Pantagruelism, gargantuan, Quixotic, Faustian, puckish, Freudian, Kafkaesque, Miltonic as well as Miltonian (the plant *Miltonia* comes from another Milton), Michelangelesque, Heracliteanism, McCarthyism, Marxism, Trotskyism. This can become an endless list, since one can add one of the suffixes to any name.

Proprietary names: victrola (gramophone) from Victor Talking Machine, to hoover, to simonize, Martinize, Sanforize (a preshrinking process), tarmac (a trademark, according to Webster), honoring the Scottish civil engineer John L. McAdam, d 1836, Hilton, Marriott, Baedeker, (founded in 1827 by Karl Baedeker), Boesendorfer, Bechstein, Steinway (three piano makers), Listerine, Singer (sewing machine), Martini (& Rossi, Italian winemakers).

New Testament: Jingo (source of jingoism) probably euphemism for Jesus, as in "by jingo", along with a lengthy list of euphemized curses, such as begorrah, bejabbers, bejeezus, by george, by golly, by gosh, by gum (see more such in Martin, 2011, as well as in Moore, 2012). Lazaret from Lazar, judas (peep-hole) after Judas Iscariot, simony after the Samaritan Simon Magnus in Acts 8:18-19, maudlin after Magdalene, Peter's Fish after the apostle.

Plants: Douglas fir, sequoia (tree) after Indian chief, bougainvillea, miltonia, rhododendron, fuchsia, gardenia, begonia, dahlia. Don't be misled by the brevity of this list: thousands of other plants are named after individuals. Many of these are listed by Wikipedia (List of rose cultivars named after people, n.d.).

Clothing items: The macintosh rain coat was patented in early 19th c. by Charles Macintosh, but it was John McIntosh who about the same time discovered and cultivated the sapling that resulted in the eponymous apple variety. Apple named the Macintosh or Mac PC after John, not Charles. Cardigan after James Brudenell, 7th Earl of Cardigan, d 1868; the place name is the English version of Welsh Ceredigion; Ceredig, a proto-Scottish hero, d 453. Bloomers from US suffragette Amelia Bloomer's pantaloons costume, the latter named after San Pantalone, a popular saint in Venice, wellingtons, garibaldi (a woman's blouse), levis after Levi Strauss.

Weapons and Vehicles: Tupolev, after Andrei Nikolayevich Tupolev, Soviet aircraft designer, Karl Gustav (a rifle and a submachine gun), Uzi after its designer IDF Major Uziel Gal, Mikhail Kalashnikov invented the eponymous assault rifle, Sten (British submachine gun) comes from the acronym of its designers Shepherd, Turpin & Enfield, Tommy gun named after General Thompson, d 1940, Browning, Smith and Wesson, Gatlin gun, Lewis gun, Martini-Henry and Winchester (both rifles). Victoria (a type of carriage, a water lily, a minor planet, a pigeon, a plum, a dress material), J. A. Hansom invented the hansom cab, Rolls Royce after Charles Rolls & Frederick Royce, Zeppelin, Cadillac, Mercedes, Ford, Chrysler, Pontiac (both car and city) from 18th c. Ottawa Indian chief.

Other; it is often unclear whether these need capitals: Fallopian (tubes) after Gabriel Fallopius, anatomist cca 1530, Pullman, lynch, boycott, albert (a watch chain), Prince Albert (a jewel inserted into the penis through piercing), ottoman from the founder of the Turkish dynasty, hitchcock chair was named after its 19th c. maker, Lambert Hitchcock, recamier after Adélaïde Récamier, d 1849, klieg lights and klieg eyes named after the inventor brothers John and Anton Klieg. Gladstone (bag) for British prime minister William Gladstone, teddy bear after Teddy Roosevelt, Rosicrucian after 17th century Christian Rosencreutz. Maecenas commemorates Gaius Maecenas (d 8 BCE), draconian from Draco, an Athenian archon of the 7th c. BCE, epicurean from Epicure, bowdler(ized) carries the name of Thomas Bowdler, d 1825, hooliganism derives from the name of a rough Irish family in London, cca 1900; chauvinism from Nicholas Chauvin, soldier of Napoleon's Grand Armée, and an etymological twin of Calvinism, quisling after Norwegian politician and traitor, d 1945. The months July and August were named after Roman rulers, maverick after Texan pioneer d 1870. C-section perhaps after Julius Caesar, sequoia (tree) after Indian chief, gerrymander after E. Gerry, Mass. Statesman, d 1814. Miranda (warning) from Ernesto Miranda, marcelled (hair), after Marcel Grateau, early 20th c. French hairdresser, martin (bird) after St. Martin, Sorbonne after French theologian Robert de Sorbon, b 1201 in Sorbon, France, Harvard after 17th c. Puritan minister John Harvard, Yale after 18th c. English merchant Elihu Yale, Dobermann after Ludwig Dobermann, 19th c. German dog-breeder.

It is not only words that undergo morphological, syntactical, phonetical, and semantic changes. Entire languages exhibit the rise-and-fall tendencies Bialik (1915/2008) attributed to words: they may disappear or they may grow. Readers will have noticed that the lists of both toponyms and eponyms are inexhaustible, similarly to the results of adding living prefixes and suffixes to existing words. This mixed bag of the many different sources of our words I have provided indicates the inherently creative nature of language, or more precisely, of the users of a language: the estimate of 170,000 to 230,000 English words (Oxford Dictionaries, 1989) is guaranteed to grow.

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