

# STYLISTIC CLASSIFICATION OF THE ENGLISH VOCABULARY

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# General considerations

The word-stock of a language can be represented as a system in which different aspects of words are singled out as interdependent.

In accordance with the division of language into literary and colloquial, we may represent the whole of the word stock of the English language as being divided into three main layers:

- **the literary layer (super-neutral words)**
- **the neutral layer**
- **the colloquial layer (sub-neutral words)**

# General considerations

The literary and colloquial layers contain a number of sub-groups. Each of these groups has an aspect it shares with all the subgroups within the layer.

The common property of the **literary layer** is its markedly *bookish character*, which makes the layer more or less stable. The common property of the **colloquial layer** of words is its *lively spoken character*, which makes it unstable, fleeting. The aspect of the **neutral layer** is its *universal character*, which means that words belonging to this layer are not restricted in use and can be employed in all styles and all spheres of human communication, which makes this layer the most stable of all.

# The literary layer (super-neutral words)

consists of the following groups of words:

1. **Common literary** (The common literary, neutral and common colloquial words are grouped under the term **standard English vocabulary**. Common literary words are chiefly used in writing and in polished speech.)
2. **Terms**
3. **Bookish and Poetic words**
4. **Archaic words**
5. **Barbarisms and Foreign words**
6. **Neologisms**

# Terms

**Terms** belong to particular sciences. Consequently, the domain of their usage is the scientific functional style. A classical term is monosemantic and has no synonyms. When used in other styles, terms produce different stylistic effects. They may sound humoristically or make speech "clever" and "scientific-like".

Terms - words denoting objects, processes, phenomena of science, humanities, technique.

- 1) Single terms: psychology, equity, function.
- 2) Terms consisting of several words: subject-matter, computer-aided system, belles-lettres style.

Compare:

*Chlorophyll makes food by photosynthesis = Green leaves build up food with the aid of light.*

# Bookish and Poetic words

**Bookish words** belong to that stratum of the vocabulary which is used in cultivated speech only - in books or in such special types of oral communication as public speeches, official negotiations. They form stylistic opposition to their colloquial synonyms.

Compare:

*infant* (bookish) - *child* (neutral) - *kid* (colloquial);

*parent* (bookish) - *father* (neutral) - *daddy* (colloquial).

A special stratum of bookish words is constituted by the words traditionally used in poetry. **Poetic words** denote a set of words traditionally used in poetry: *behold, deem, thee, quoth, aught, foe, ere, woe, nigh, oft, anon, morn, visage*.

They are mostly used in poetry in the 17 – 19 cc.:

e.g. "steed" - horse, "quoth" - said, "woe" - sorrow, "eftsoons" - again, soon after, "rondure" - roundness .

# Archaic words

Historical words, denoting historical phenomena which are no more in use and have no notion at present:

*e.g. yeoman, coif and distaff; vassal, falconet.*

1. **Obsolete words:** *methinks(it seems to me), nay(no); a palfrey(a small horse),aforesaid, hereinafternamed;*
2. **Archaisms proper:** *troth (faith);*
3. **Historical words:** *knight, spear; worrier;*
4. **Poetic words:** *woe(sorrow), haply (perhaps);*
5. **Morphological forms:** *singest, brethren,thou, thou makest.*

Archaic words belong to Old English and are not recognized nowadays. The main function of old words is to create a realistic background to historical works of literature.

# Barbarisms and Foreign words

Barbarisms and foreignisms have the same origin. They are borrowings from other languages.

The greater part of barbarisms was borrowed into English from French and Latin (*parvenu* - выскочка; *protege* - протее; *a propos* - кстати; *beau monde* - высший свет; *de novo* - сизнова; *alter ego* - другое «я»; *datum* - сведения, информация).

**Barbarisms** are assimilated borrowings. Being part of the English word-stock, they are fixed in dictionaries.

**Foreignisms** are non-assimilated borrowings occasionally used in speech for stylistic reasons. They do not belong to the English vocabulary and are not registered by lexicographers.

The main function of barbarisms and foreignisms is to create a realistic background to the stories about foreign habits, customs, traditions and conditions of life.



# Neologisms

**Neologisms** are newly born words. Most of them are terms. The layer of terminological neologisms has been rapidly growing since the start of the technological revolution.

*(network server, browser, e-mail, provider, site)*

*Hacker* means "someone who uses a computer to connect to other people's computers secretly and often illegally in order to find or change information".

## Stylistic functions of literary layer of the vocabulary:

1. To characterize the speech of the bygone epoch and to reproduce atmosphere of antiquity.
2. To introduce the atmosphere or professional activity.
3. To create romantic atmosphere, the general colouring of elevation (in poetry).
4. To introduce the atmosphere of solemnity (in official speech) or the local colouring of the country described.

## The neutral layer

Neutral words comprise the overwhelming majority of lexis, used in all spheres of human activity and being the main source of synonyms and polysemantic words. They are used in both literary and colloquial language. It is the neutral stock of words that is so prolific in the production of new meanings.

# The colloquial layer (sub-neutral words)

Among the sub-neutral words the following groups are distinguished:

1. Words used in informal speech only - the colloquial words
2. Jargon words and slang, as well as individual creations (nonce-words)
3. Vulgar words.

# The colloquial words

Common colloquial vocabulary is part of Standard English word-stock. It borders both on neutral vocabulary and on special colloquial vocabulary. Colloquialisms are familiar words and idioms used in informal speech and writing, but unacceptable in polite conversation or business correspondence.

Compare:

standard speech sentence *"Sir, you speak clearly and to the point"*

and its colloquial equivalent *"Friend, you talk plain and hit the nail right on the head"*.

# The colloquial words

Colloquial words are employed in non-official everyday communication and mark the message as informal, non-official and conversational. Their use is associated with the oral form of communication.

*E.g. "dad", "kid", "crony", "fan", "to pop", "folks".*

# Jargon words

**Jargonisms** - are a low colloquial words, which are used by limited groups of people, united

- either professionally (professional jargonisms or professionalisms)
- or socially (jargonisms proper).

They cover a narrow semantic field, function and sphere of application and tend to expanded synonymy within certain lexico-semantic groups.

Function: to replace those words which already exist in the language in order to make their speech incoherent to outsiders.

# Professional Jargonisms and Social Jargonisms

**Professional jargonisms** are denominations of things, phenomena and process characteristic of given profession opposed to the official terms of this professional sphere.

**Function:** They are used by representatives of the profession to facilitate the communication.

**Social jargonisms** are made of words used to denote non-professional thing relevant for representatives of the given social group with common interests (e.g., music fans, drug addicts and the like).

**Function:** they are used by representatives of the given group to show that the speaker also belongs to it and sometimes for the purpose of making speech incoherent to outsiders.



# Slang

**Slang** is a special vocabulary of low and vulgar type , often fresh and emotional description of an object , being highly colloquial and possessing all the connotations: emotive, expressive, evaluative and stylistic:

*money (jack, tin, brass, vof, dough, slippery stuff, loot, lolls, gravy, bucks, etc).*

Function: to characterize the personage, to create a certain atmosphere (that of scandal, violence or intolerance or humor) in the literary text.

# Nonce words

**Nonce-words** are chance words, occasional words, words created for the given occasion with the existing words by means of affixation, composition, conversion, etc.

*Ex.: There was a balconyful of gentlemen...*

The word balconyful was coined by analogy with the words “mouthful”, “spoonful”, “handful”. Nonce-words produce a humorous effect. Being used just once, they disappear completely.

# Vulgar words

## VULGARISMS (SWEAR WORDS)

Stylistically lowest group of words which are considered offensive for polite usage.

- abusive words, *e.g. son of a bitch*;
- hackneyed vulgar words: devil, bloody.

Function: to express strong emotions, mainly annoyance, anger, vexation and the like.

# Stylistic functions of non-literary vocabulary:

1. To create true-to-life, authentic atmosphere;
2. To create the atmosphere of informality, intimacy;
3. To create a sense of immediate communication with the reader;
4. To create a satirical or ironical effect.

# Dialect words

Against the background of the literary language dialect words as dialect peculiarities of speech are stylistically relevant.

Dialect words - are words and phrases characteristic of a certain locality. They reflect peculiarities of provincialism in phonetics and vocabulary.

Of special significance for English literature is Cockney-the dialect of the uneducated people in London.