THE GREAT COURSES®

Topic
Professional

Subtopic
Communication Skills

Building a Better Vocabulary

Course Guidebook

Professor Kevin Flanigan
West Chester University of Pennsylvania

PUBLISHED BY:

THE GREAT COURSES
Corporate Headquarters
4840 Westfields Boulevard, Suite 500
Chantilly, Virginia 20151-2299
Phone: 1-800-832-2412
Fax: 703-378-3819
www.thegreatcourses.com

Copyright © The Teaching Company, 2015

Printed in the United States of America

This book is in copyright. All rights reserved.

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above,
no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted,
in any form, or by any means
(electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise),
without the prior written permission of
The Teaching Company.

Kevin Flanigan, Ph.D.

Professor of Education
West Chester University of Pennsylvania

Professor Kevin Flanigan is a Professor of Education in the Literacy Department at West Chester University of Pennsylvania, where he has taught since 2003. He is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Mary Washington College (now the University of Mary Washington), where he received a B.A. in History, summa cum laude. Later, he received an M.Ed. from James Madison University and an M.Ed. in Reading Education from the University of Virginia. After working as a middle grades classroom teacher and reading specialist, he received his Ph.D. in Reading Education from the University of Virginia, with a dissertation on emergent readers' developing concept of word in text.

Professor Flanigan's research, publications, and presentations focus on developmental word knowledge, vocabulary development and instruction, and interventions for students who struggle with literacy skills. He has presented frequently at national and international conferences and works with schools and teachers to implement effective literacy instruction.

In 2011, Professor Flanigan was nominated for the U.S. Professors of the Year Award by West Chester University. In 2009, Professor Flanigan and his colleagues received an Educator 500 award for innovative teaching in the Kennett Experience, a university–public school partnership. Professor Flanigan teaches graduate and undergraduate literacy education courses and works in the West Chester University Reading Center, where he supervises graduate-level teachers as they work with students in kindergarten through 12th grade who struggle with literacy skills.

Professor Flanigan is first author of the coauthored book *Words Their Way with Struggling Readers: Word Study for Reading, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction, Grades 4–12*. He is also coauthor of *Vocabulary Their*

Way: Word Study with Middle and Secondary Students (2nd edition) and *Developing Word Recognition*. In addition, Professor Flanigan is a member of the authorship team for Vocabulary Their Way: Words and Strategies for Academic Success, a vocabulary program for middle school students. The professor has authored or coauthored articles in a number of professional journals, including *The Reading Teacher*, the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, and the *Journal of Literacy Research*. ■

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Professor Biography i
Course Scope 1

LECTURE GUIDES

LECTURE 1
Five Principles for Learning Vocabulary 3

LECTURE 2
The Spelling-Meaning Connection 10

LECTURE 3
Words for Lying, Swindling, and Conniving 17

LECTURE 4
Words That Express Annoyance and Disgust 24

LECTURE 5
Fighting Words and Peaceful Words 31

LECTURE 6
Going beyond Dictionary Meanings..38

LECTURE 7
Wicked Words 46

LECTURE 8
Words for Beginnings and Endings 52

LECTURE 9
Words Expressing Fear, Love, and Hatred..58

LECTURE 10
Words for the Everyday and the Elite 63

Table of Contents

LECTURE 11
Words from Gods and Heroes 69

LECTURE 12
Humble Words and Prideful Words 76

LECTURE 13
High-Frequency Greek and Latin Roots 83

LECTURE 14
Words Relating to Belief and Trust 90

LECTURE 15
Words for the Way We Talk 97

LECTURE 16
Words for Praise, Criticism, and Nonsense...................................104

LECTURE 17
Eponyms from Literature and History 111

LECTURE 18
Thinking, Teaching, and Learning Words 119

LECTURE 19
Words for the Diligent and the Lazy 126

LECTURE 20
Words That Break and Words That Join..132

LECTURE 21
Some High-Utility Greek and Latin Affixes.....................................139

LECTURE 22
Cranky Words and Cool Words 145

LECTURE 23
Words for Courage and Cowardice 151

Table of Contents

LECTURE 24
Reviewing Vocabulary through Literature..158

LECTURE 25
Words for Killing and Cutting..165

LECTURE 26
A Vocabulary Grab Bag..171

LECTURE 27
Words for Words...176

LECTURE 28
Specialty Words for Language..182

LECTURE 29
Nasty Words and Nice Words...192

LECTURE 30
Words for the Really Big and the Very Small..................................198

LECTURE 31
Spelling as a Vocabulary Tool...205

LECTURE 32
A Medley of New Words..212

LECTURE 33
Building Vocabulary through Games...217

LECTURE 34
Words English Borrowed and Never Returned................................224

LECTURE 35
More Foreign Loan Words...232

LECTURE 36
Forgotten Words and Neologisms...237

Table of Contents

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Answers to Review Questions..245
Glossary of Target Words 263
Bibliography...279

Building a Better Vocabulary

Scope:

In one of the most insightful statements on vocabulary ever penned, Mark Twain said, “The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter—’tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.” As Mark Twain knew, a powerful vocabulary consists of more than simply knowing a lot of words; it’s the ability to grasp the “just right” word to communicate precisely what you want to say or write.

Acquiring the type of deep and nuanced vocabulary knowledge that Twain was talking about doesn’t come from simply studying lists of vocabulary words alongside dictionary definitions. This traditional “one-word-at-a-time” approach that many of us experienced in school often leads to surface-level vocabulary knowledge that lasts only until the Friday quiz.

In this course, you’ll learn how to move beyond definitional vocabulary knowledge toward a rich vocabulary that’s broad, deep, and flexible and lasts a lifetime. To do this, we’ll cover five core principles of vocabulary learning in the first lecture. These principles will serve as tools in your vocabulary toolbox that you can apply as we explore new target words throughout the course. You will use these tools to learn word meanings deeply so that you’ll remember and be able to use the words years from now.

As we move through the lectures, we’ll meet and explore a host of vocabulary words that are, by turns, snappy, lively, powerful, and beautiful, such as *gadfly*, *Promethean*, *gemūtlichkeit*, and *hornswoggle*. The lectures are organized thematically; for example, in a lecture on liars and swindlers, we’ll examine a set of words for conniving flimflammers, such as *mountebanks* and *sophists*, honoring the way our minds organize vocabulary by meaning. We’ll also take the time to examine words in rich context to get a better feel for how to actually use them in speaking and writing. In addition, you’ll learn to make personal connections to word meanings so that these words “stick” in your lexicon—the mental library of word meanings we all possess. Along the way, we’ll see that there’s no such thing as an exact synonym

and explore the finer distinctions in meaning among closely related words; in the end, you'll know the difference between such words as *specious* and *spurious* and when to use each.

Importantly, we will also delve into the etymology and morphology of words—that is, their history and structure. This will enable you to harness the power of the "meaning system" that is deeply embedded in the DNA of the English language, applying your growing knowledge of high-utility Latin and Greek affixes and roots to learn, store, and make connections among words. To guide your learning, you will also create a vocabulary notebook that will serve as a place to collect your growing vocabulary.

By the end of this course, you'll know many new, powerful, and beautiful vocabulary words. Just as importantly, you'll know how to learn vocabulary for yourself. You'll have your own toolbox of strategies and resources that will equip you for a lifetime of vocabulary learning. ■

Five Principles for Learning Vocabulary

Lecture 1

One reason to spend time and effort improving your vocabulary is that words have the power to change how you see the world. Further, our ability to use vocabulary effectively is one of the primary means by which we communicate and connect with important people in our lives. Choosing just the right word adds precision and clarity to our speech and writing. Words are the tools we use to inform, advise, persuade, and reason. But to start expanding your vocabulary, you need a structured approach—and that's what we'll learn in this lecture: five principles for building and using a rich vocabulary. Together, these principles provide an efficient method for harnessing the power of the English language.

The Dimmer-Switch Phenomenon

- Learning words is not an all-or-nothing affair, as though one moment, you've never heard of a word and then, immediately after looking it up in the dictionary, you become an expert user of that word. That would be like flipping a light switch from off to on.

- A better metaphor that vocabulary researchers use is the dimmer switch, which gradually increases the amount of light in a room. Vocabulary learning works in the same way—gradually and incrementally. We first learn the dictionary definition of a word, then gradually become comfortable with how it's used in various contexts as we try it out ourselves.

- Most of us can rate our knowledge of a particular word on a scale of 1 to 4, using the levels proposed by the educational researcher Edgar Dale:
    1. I do not know the word, and I have never seen it before.

    2. I've heard of the word before, but I'm not sure what it means.

3. I know the word and can recognize and understand it while reading, but I probably wouldn't feel comfortable using it in writing or speech.

4. I know the word well and can use it in writing and speaking.

- As you learn new words throughout this course, remember the dimmer-switch metaphor. Don't feel that you have to master new words immediately, as if your brain were an on/off switch. It may take some time and practice before you feel comfortable with a new word.
    - In fact, we know from vocabulary research that it takes multiple exposures across many contexts before we really start to "know" a word.

    - For example, one study conducted by literacy researchers Beck, Perfetti, and McKeown found that we need 12 exposures to a word before there's a difference in our comprehension of a passage containing that word.

Factotum (noun)

Someone hired to do a variety of jobs; a jack-of-all-trades.

- Let's explore the word *factotum* as an example of best practices in vocabulary learning. First, we start with a clear definition: A *factotum* is someone hired to do a variety of jobs, someone who has many responsibilities, a jack-of-all-trades.

- Second, place the word in context, using it in a sentence. For example: "Tessa, the office factotum, does the billing, answers the phones, helps out in the PR department, and even knows how to cook a mean blueberry scone—she's indispensable!"

- Third, make connections to the word. Think of some examples of a factotum in your life, such as a general handyman or even your

mother. To make the connection personal, picture the word itself next to an image of this person in your mind.

- Fourth, take the time to explore the word in a little more depth.
  - In this case, you might learn that the root of *factotum*, *fac*, is from the Latin verb *facio*, meaning "to make or do." Another English word that starts with *fac* is *factory*, a place where things are made. The key word *factory* can help you remember the meaning of the root *fac*.

  - In addition, the Latin word *totum*—the second part of *factotum*—means "all." Thus, a factotum is someone who "does it all." If you remember *factotum* in this way, you'll never forget it.

- To make *factotum* memorable, we used four principles of vocabulary learning; we'll use these same principles throughout the course:
  - Definitions. For each target word, we'll learn a clear definition that distills the critical aspects of what the word means—and what it doesn't mean.

  - Context. We will then place each target word in the context of a sentence to get a feel for how it's actually used. Remember, if you want to really know a shark, you study it in the ocean—its natural habitat. If you want to really know a word, you study how it behaves in its natural habitat—sentences, paragraphs, and books.

  - Connections. We'll make connections to each word. Think of a vocabulary word as a label for an underlying concept. With *factotum*, you already knew the basic concept—everyone knows someone who does a little bit of everything—but you may not have had the label for it—the word *factotum*. We connected the new word/label to your known concept.

- ○ Morphology. Next, we'll explore each word's morphological structure. *Morphology* is the study of the structure of words, including meaningful word parts, such as roots, and patterns and processes of word formation. The morphological system in English can be an incredibly powerful system for learning vocabulary if you know how to tap into it. To remember the word *factotum*, we broke it down by its meaningful parts: the Latin root *fac* and the word *totum*.

Procrustean (adjective)

Tending to produce conformity by arbitrary, ruthless, or violent means.

- Before we move on to the fifth principle, let's practice the first four with the word *procrustean*. This word means "tending to produce conformity by arbitrary, ruthless, or violent means."

- Here's *procrustean* in context: "Even though the student's poem unanimously won the all-county writing contest, the procrustean English teacher gave her an F for failing to dot the *i* in her name."

- Now make a personal connection. Have you ever met someone who's completely inflexible, a stickler for rules and regulations? Try to associate that person in your mind with the word *procrustean*.

- *Procrustean* comes from Greek mythology. Procrustes was a mythical bandit of Attica who would waylay hapless travelers and attempt to fit them to his iron bed. If travelers were too long for the bed, he'd cut off their feet. If they were too short, he'd stretch them out. A *procrustean bed* has come to mean an arbitrary standard to which something is forced to conform.
  - ○ You now know an *etymological narrative* about *procrustean*. The etymology of a word is its history, including its origin, evolution, spread to other languages, and shifts in meaning and form over time. A narrative, of course, is a story. Thus, an etymological narrative is a story about the history of a word.

© flySnowr/iStock/Thinkstock.

A significant part of a word's etymology is its morphology, often including the Latin or Greek roots from which it sprang.

- As cognitive psychologist Daniel Willingham notes, our minds are hardwired to remember stories. This is why we generally find it easier to remember stories people tell us than information presented in a non-story format, such as facts in a science textbook. Etymological narratives can serve as powerful vocabulary-learning tools.

Semantic Chunking

- Once we've used these four principles to learn new words, how do we organize the words in a way that makes sense? In other words, how do we store these words in our lexicon—our mental library of word meanings—so that when we need to retrieve them for use, we know where to find them?

- This question brings us to our fifth vocabulary-learning principle: Word learning should be structured. And indeed, the best structure for learning new words is one that reflects the way that our brains naturally organize and store information—in chunks.

- The idea of chunking vocabulary items is related to a well-known concept in cognitive science: *schema theory*. According to this theory, we organize and categorize knowledge by abstract mental frameworks or structures called *schema*. Think of schema as mental file folders in which we organize information. Schemas help us keep track of information in our brains and avoid the pitfalls of the "mental junk drawer."

- Compare the chunking technique of vocabulary learning—grouping related words into categories by meaning—with the traditional approach to vocabulary instruction that many of us experienced in school.
    - Often, we were given lists of vocabulary words to memorize that were organized alphabetically, such as *baleful*, *ballyhoo*, *bastion*, *bedlam*, and so on. Many of us learned these words for the test on Friday and promptly forgot them by the following Monday. We simply stuffed these words into our mental junk drawers, not making connections among them or organizing them into chunks by common meaning.

    - A better approach to learning vocabulary would be to give students a list of related words, such as *kerfuffle*, *imbroglio*, *melee*, *hullabaloo*, *tussle*, *donnybrook*, and *spat*. If this was our list for the week, we'd not only study the common meaning they all share—a type of disagreement or fight—but we would also examine the finer shades of distinction and nuances of meaning among the words.

    - If we organize our vocabulary learning by meaning, honoring the way our brains work, we will dramatically improve our chances of remembering and using new words. This method of organizing words by meaning is known as *semantic chunking*. Together with definition, context, connection, and morphology, this principle will give us a solid foundation for building a better vocabulary.

Review Questions

1. List the five principles of vocabulary learning.

2. How does the idea of semantic chunking relate to schema theory in cognitive science?

3. A person who is completely inflexible might be described as __________.

4. Chris, who could fix a leaky faucet, replace a broken lock, and correctly hook up a DVR, was valued as the neighborhood __________.

The Spelling-Meaning Connection

Lecture 2

In our first lecture, we discussed five core principles of effective vocabulary learning: starting with clear definitions, putting words into context, making connections between known concepts and new words, exploring the morphology and etymology of words, and chunking words by meaning in our mental lexicons. This last principle takes advantage of the fact that our minds organize information, including words, according to schema, or mental file folders. In this lecture, we'll delve a bit deeper into the morphological system of English to explore one of the big "secrets" of vocabulary learning: Just as our minds organize language, so, too, language has a system for organizing words.

Building a Large Vocabulary

- The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) is generally considered to be the most authoritative dictionary of the English language. The second edition of the *OED* includes more than 600,000 definitions.

- Most of us "know" only a portion of these words, meaning that we understand them if we encounter them in reading. And most of us feel comfortable using an even smaller portion in expressive language—speech or writing. For example, a common estimate for the average vocabulary of a high school graduate is approximately 40,000 words, and for an average college graduate, approximately 60,000 to 75,000 words.

- Of course, there is no way that anyone can obtain a 75,000-word vocabulary through direct instruction, one word at a time. That's why traditional word-by-word approaches to learning vocabulary aren't the most effective. Instead, most people who possess large vocabularies acquire them through reading. As adults, we pick up the vast majority of new vocabulary incidentally through meaningful reading in connected text.

© decisiveimages/iStock/Thinkstock.

Most people who have a deep, broad, flexible vocabulary are also avid readers.

- This doesn't mean that we should give up on studying vocabulary directly. But if we're serious about improving vocabulary, in addition to wide reading, we need to be strategic and thoughtful about how we study words—in particular, using the five principles we've already discussed. Our language itself helps us in this study by organizing words by meaning—if we know how to look for this system.

- English has a built-in system of meaning, or morphology, that is largely based on the classic Greek and Latin origins of our language. In fact, approximately 70 percent of English vocabulary is derived from Greek and Latin roots and affixes. Those who know how to harness this morphological system are at a great advantage, not only when it comes to learning more words but also when it comes to storing them in their mental lexicons.

The Spelling-Meaning Connection

- One of the keys to unlocking this morphological system is a concept known as the *spelling-meaning connection*, a term coined

by vocabulary researcher Shane Templeton. Think of morphology as the umbrella term here, and the spelling-meaning connection as an important tool we can use to decode that system. The spelling-meaning connection also shows us that our spelling system makes more sense than you may think.

- Consider, for example, the word *health*, which is spelled with a silent *a*. Notice that if we remove the last two letters of *health*—*th*—we get *heal*. That silent *a* gives us a visual clue to the fact that *health* is directly related in meaning to *heal*, *healer*, and so on. Thus, the spelling-meaning connection states: "Words that are related in spelling are often related in meaning, despite changes in sound."

- There are many other word pairs that illustrate the spelling-meaning connection in English, such as *colum**n**/colum**n**ist*, *hym**n**/hym**n**al*, and *crum**b**/crum**b**le*. The spelling-meaning connection biases us to retain the silent letters in our written representations of the first words in these pairs, pointing us to the related second words.

- Another example of a similar word pair is *resi**g**n/resi**g**nation*. A number of other words are related in spelling and meaning to *resign*, including *sign*, *insignia*, *design*, *signal*, *significant*, and others. All these words are derived from the Latin root *signum*, which means "a symbol or mark." They all share a common core meaning related to a common spelling.

- When we use the morphological approach to learning words, we can begin to see why the great linguist Noam Chomsky said that the conventional English spelling system is "a near optimal system for the lexical representation of English words." Many critics of our spelling system don't understand that the system evolved to represent both sound and meaning. For this reason, knowing a little about spelling can actually improve your vocabulary knowledge.

Analyzing *fac* Words

- To further illustrate the spelling-meaning connection, let's return to the word *factotum*. As you recall, we divided *factotum* into two

morphemes, *fac* and *totum*. *Fac* is from the Latin word *facio*, which means "to do or make," and *totum* is a Latin word meaning "all." A *factotum*, then, is someone who does everything.

- Many other English words that contain the root *fac* share the core meaning of "do or make." For example:
  - A *fact* is something that's true. This word is derived from the Latin *factum*, meaning "thing done." If something was done, it actually happened; therefore, it's true—a fact.

  - The *manu* in *manufacture* is the Latin word for "hand," as in the phrase "manual labor." Thus, something that is manufactured is literally "made by hand," not something found in nature.

  - *Facile* means easily "done" or accomplished.

- Let's apply four of the five principles we learned in the last lecture to another *fac* word, *factitious*.

Factitious (adjective)

1. Made or manufactured; not natural.

2. Made up in the sense of contrived; a sham, fake, or phony.

- *Factitious* is an adjective that has two definitions, again, both related to the meaning of "make."

- To put the word in context, we might say: (1) "The CIA agent hid his message inside the hollow factitious rock by the bridge; his handler would pick up the message a few hours later"; or (2) "My dad's factitious smile didn't fool anyone; he was definitely not happy to see our cousins show up once again unannounced."

- Next, connect the word *factitious* to something in your own personal experience that is artificial. Perhaps you own a factitious

diamond or you've been in a situation where you've felt obliged to put on a factitious smile or laugh.

- The etymology of *factitious* can be a little tricky because it has the word *fact* in it, which might lead you to think it means "true." However, the root in *factitious* is *fac*, which means "make," and we associated this root with the key word *factory*. Of course, a factory brings to mind things that are made by humans and are not natural. Thus, when you run across *factitious*, think of a factory, making artificial things.

Organizing Your Learning

- In these first two lectures, we've focused on how to learn vocabulary, but for the remainder of the course, we'll learn approximately 10 new target words per lecture. To keep this cornucopia of vocabulary organized, you may want to keep a vocabulary notebook or create a vocabulary file on your computer or tablet. Organize your notebook along the same lines as these lectures, by general concept and topic.

- For each word, use the vocabulary-learning principles we've discussed. Include a clear definition, write the word in a rich contextual sentence, make a personal connection to the word, and include notes on the morphology and etymology of the word.

- As you continue to learn and collect words on your own after you finish this course, you can also include these in the notebook and add new topical sections. Think of your vocabulary notebook as your own repository of powerful words that you can draw on when needed.

Morphology 101

- To conclude this introduction to learning principles and concepts, let's define some important morphological terms that we'll use throughout the course.

- A *base word* is a word that can stand on its own. In the word *unprofitable*, for example, the base word is *profit*, which means "monetary gain."

- A *prefix* is a morpheme, or unit of meaning, that can be attached to the beginning of a base word or root. The prefix in *unprofitable* is *un*-, meaning "not."

- A *suffix* is a morpheme that can be attached to the end of a base word or root. The suffix in *unprofitable* is -*able*, meaning "capable of."

- *Affix* is the umbrella term for prefixes and suffixes.

- *Roots* are morphemes that cannot stand alone but to which prefixes and suffixes can attach. We've already worked extensively with one root: *fac*. Another example is the Latin root *spect*, meaning "look or see." *Spect* isn't a standalone English word, but it's an incredibly fertile root, giving us *spectacles*, *inspector*, *spectator*, *speculate*, *retrospect*, and many other words.

Circumspect (adjective)

Cautious, prudent.

- *Circumspect* is a combination of *circum* ("around") and *spect* ("look"). To remember this word, think of a cautious person "looking around" before he or she acts.

Review Questions

1. What is the spelling-meaning connection?

2. What types of information and reminders should you include for the entries in your vocabulary notebook?

3. A friend who is __________ can be a good person with whom to share secrets.

4. Chip's __________ laugh revealed to close friends that he didn't find the joke funny at all.

Words for Lying, Swindling, and Conniving

Lecture 3

Benjamin Disraeli, the well-known British prime minister of the 19th century, has been credited with saying, “There are three types of lies: lies, damn lies, and statistics.” Unfortunately, lying has been a part of the human condition since the beginning of time. We’ve all been lied to, deceived, and perhaps even conned at one time or another in our lives. Fortunately, even if Disraeli is correct about there being only three types of lies, we have more than three words in English to describe liars and the lies they tell. In this lecture, we’ll explore a number of powerful words to describe cheats, swindlers, charlatans, scam artists, barracudas, sharks, and sharpies and their swindles, hustles, flimflams, and double dealings.

Mountebank (noun)

A flamboyant swindler; a flimflammer; someone who claims to be an expert but isn’t.

- You may have encountered a mountebank when you’re up late, channel surfing, and come upon an infomercial for a “nutrition supplement” derived from an exotic plant root that can supposedly cure everything from migraines to stomach aches. Needless to say, you’re skeptical of the TV spokesperson’s extravagant claims. The word for this type of fast-talking salesperson pushing quack remedies is a *mountebank*.

© Studio-Annika/iStock/Thinkstock.

Mountebanks often claim to be doctors, but they can also claim to be other types of experts; underneath their authentic appearance, they’re frauds.

- *Mountebank* comes from an Italian phrase meaning to “mount a bench” and refers to a quack doctor or

swindler, who would enter a town, mount a bench in the public square to draw a crowd, and try to sell fake potions to a susceptible public. To remember this word, picture a similar situation in your mind or draw a quick sketch of it in your vocabulary notebook. Keep *mount* in mind as your key word for *mountebank*.

- You might also jot down a personal experience you've had with someone who made extravagant claims about a product that didn't live up to its billing. Remember, making personal connections to word meanings will help you to store these words in your lexicon for later use in conversation and writing.

- Synonyms for *mountebank* include *charlatan*, *con artist*, *flimflammer*, *conniver*, and *shyster*.

Sophist (noun)

One skilled in elaborate and devious argumentation.

- *Sophist* refers to a different type of trickster—not one who tries to sell you a counterfeit product, such as a *mountebank*, but one who tries to sell you a counterfeit argument. *Sophistry* is a related word that refers to the act of intentionally attempting to deceive someone with a tricky, intellectually dishonest argument.

- Think back to a time when you have watched a political debate. You may have been swayed by one politician's argument until a second politician begins to rebut it, poking holes in the first candidate's reasoning and demonstrating how he or she played fast and loose with the facts. At this point, you may have realized that the first politician was intentionally trying to deceive you with verbal gymnastics. The name for a politician who tries to pull the wool over your eyes in this way is a *sophist*.

- *Sophist* comes from the Greek root *sophos*, meaning "wise," as well as "skilled or clever." For sophists, the emphasis is more on "skilled and clever" than "wise."

- The sophists were itinerant teachers in ancient Greece who taught, among other things, rhetoric, or the art of persuasive speaking and writing. Sophists were known for their clever but not necessarily logical arguments.

- Their detractors claimed that sophists weren't on a journey to find the truth; instead, they were trying to persuade others by any argumentative trick or intellectual sleight of hand that would enable them to win. In this light, you can see how *sophist* became a term of contempt.

- You can remember *sophist* by thinking of a related word that you already know that begins with the same Greek root: *sophomore*. Again, *sophos* means "wise," and *moros* means "foolish"; thus, a *sophomore* is a "wise fool." Because sophomores have been in school just long enough to think they know it all, some consider "wise fools" an apt description.

Specious (adjective)

Having the ring of truth or plausibility but actually fallacious.

- As we've just seen, sophists can be described as clever debaters who attempt to deceive their listeners with plausible but unfounded arguments. *Specious* is an adjective that describes the type of argument a sophist might deliver: one that seems plausible on the surface but is fallacious underneath.

- *Specious* comes from the Latin *speciosus*, meaning "good looking," which came from *species*, meaning "appearance." Thus, a specious argument is one that "looks good" on the surface but isn't sound. *Specious* is also related to the Latin root *spec*, meaning "look." To remember this word, highlight the *spec* in *specious* in your vocabulary notebook and connect it to the root *spec*.

- As you recall, chunking words that are semantically related is one of the key principles of vocabulary learning. Thus, it's useful to

think of the target words *sophist* and *specious* together, as in: "That *sophist* is spewing forth *specious* arguments! I won't trust another word he says."

Spurious (adjective)

Not genuine, authentic, or true; false.

- *Spurious* is often used as a synonym for *specious*, but it actually has a slightly different connotation. Like *specious*, *spurious* refers to something that is false or counterfeit, including an argument or claim. However, as we saw, a specious argument seems plausible on the surface; in contrast, a spurious argument is immediately recognized as false.

- *Collocates* are words that commonly occur together. Both *specious* and *spurious* commonly occur with *argument*, *reasoning*, and *charges*, as in such phrases as *specious argument* and *spurious charges*.

Apocryphal (adjective)

Of doubtful or dubious authenticity; false.

- Use the word *apocryphal* if you want to emphasize that a story or claim is not only probably false but also difficult to verify or find evidence for.

- Originally, the Apocrypha were texts that were not included in the Bible because their authenticity could not be firmly established. Today, urban legends are often described as apocryphal because they are passed on by a "friend of a friend." When you hear the word *apocryphal*, think of the tales of Bigfoot or the stories you've heard about alligators living in the New York City sewer system.

Ersatz (adjective)

Describes an inferior substitute.

- The story of how *ersatz* entered English is a wonderful example of our language's capacity to borrow and absorb words from other languages. During World War II, British POWs were served *ersatzbrot*, or "substitute bread," made from low-quality potato starch, flour, and even sawdust. When they returned home after the war, the former POWs began using the term *ersatz* to describe anything that was an inferior substitute.

- Make a personal connection to this word by recalling a time when you bought a low-grade, generic substitute for a common product, such as ketchup, that may have caused a revolt among your family.

Skulduggery (noun)

Devious, deceitful behavior; underhanded dealings.

- *Skulduggery* is a somewhat archaic word of Scottish origin, but it's on Wayne State University's excellent Word Warriors' list. Each year, the Word Warriors announce their list of "great, underused words to bring back." You can nominate your own word for next year or look over the lively, underused words they've selected from previous years at http://wordwarriors.wayne.edu/.

Machinations (noun)

Intrigues, plots, crafty schemes, or the act of plotting.

- One way to remember *machinations* is to link the first five letters—*machi*—to Machiavelli, the 15th-century Italian statesman and writer who famously depicted unscrupulous politicians—those given to machinations and intrigue—in his classic work *The Prince*. You might even encounter the phrase *Machiavellian machinations*.

- In fact, the word *political* is by far the most common collocate with machinations, as in *political machinations*. *Devious*, *corrupt*, and *evil* are other adjectives commonly found before the word *machinations*.

Hornswoggle (verb)

To swindle, cheat, or dupe.

- Most sources report that *hornswoggle* has no known origin, beyond being an Americanism that entered American English in the early 1800s. However, according to one (probably apocryphal) etymological narrative, the word describes a cow woggling (wiggling or shaking) its head back and forth in an attempt to free its horns from a lasso and, thus, *hornswoggle*, or "cheat," both the lasso and the cowboy. Even if this story can't be verified, it makes a wonderful visual to help you remember the meaning of the word *hornswoggle*.

- Two fun synonyms for *hornswoggle* are *bamboozle* and *hoodwink*.

Review Questions

1. The classic urban legend that Mr. Rogers served as a Navy SEAL and always appeared on television in a sweater to cover his tattoos can best be described as __________.

2. What word brings to mind the patent medicine salesman of the Old West?

3. And what did the patent medicine salesman attempt to do to the crowds he addressed?

4. This word can be traced back to a group of itinerant teachers in ancient Greece who specialized in providing instruction in the art of rhetoric.

5. This word for a substitute carries the connotation of inferior.

6. How would you describe an argument that is deceptively plausible?

7. How would you describe an argument that is immediately recognizable as implausible?

8. Political __________ might include such acts as wiretapping, bribery, or other forms of intrigue and __________.

Words That Express Annoyance and Disgust

Lecture 4

All parents, as much as they love their children, know that there are times when family members get annoyed with one another. Parents of teenagers, in particular, can relate to this quote from Mark Twain: "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years." Amazingly, the same qualities in a person that annoy us at one time don't seem so bad later. In this lecture, we'll explore words related to three personality types that we've all encountered: the annoying, the offensive, and the sickly sweet.

Gadfly (noun)

1. A persistently annoying person who questions, critiques, and pesters.
2. An insect that annoys livestock by biting and sucking their blood.

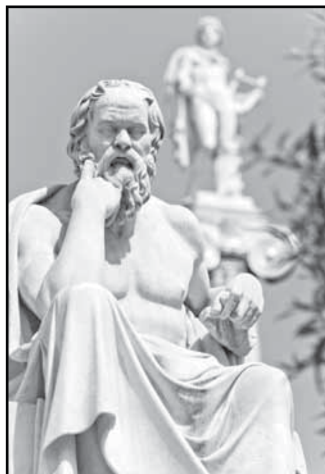
- *Gadfly* is a wonderfully useful word for all of the irritating critics in our lives—the people who constantly pester, provoke, and annoy the rest of us with their criticisms, demands, requests, ideas, and schemes.

- It's easy to remember *gadfly* if you know that it also refers to an actual insect that annoys livestock animals by biting and sucking their blood.

- The prefix *gad*- comes from an Old Norse word that means "spike or nail"—something like a stinger. To remember *gadfly*, picture an annoying person buzzing around and trying to sting you with needling critiques and bothersome questions. If it helps, sketch a quick picture of an insect with a large stinger in your vocabulary notebook.

- You may also see *gadfly* used alongside its collocate, *political*, as in the phrase *a political gadfly*. The Greek philosopher Socrates was a self-described gadfly, questioning the political state of Athens. Political gadflies, although bothersome to those in power, serve the purpose of keeping politicians on their toes.

- Informal synonyms for *gadfly* include *nag*, *pest*, and *thorn in the side*. Another wonderful synonym for *gadfly* is a word borrowed from Yiddish, *nudnik*, meaning "a dull, boring pest."


© thegreekphotoholic/iStock/Thinkstock.

According to Plato's *Apology*, Socrates saw Athens as a lazy horse that needed to be roused by his gadfly sting.

Querulous (adjective)

Full of complaints; complaining in an annoyed way.

- *Querulous* can be used to describe a person or his or her manner or actions. For example: "Her normally positive teenage daughter became querulous when she stayed up too late, complaining about her teachers, her social life, and her siblings."

- English has a number of other excellent words to describe people who show impatience or anger for no good reason, including *peevish*, *petulant*, *testy*, and *carping*.
    - Use *peevish* to describe people who complain about petty or trivial things.
    - Use *petulant* to describe behavior like that of a spoiled child.
    - Use the verb *carp* to emphasize particularly mean-spirited, nasty criticizing or nitpicking.

- At first glance, *querulous* might seem to be related to *query*, which can be used as a noun to mean "a question." However, *querulous* and *query* actually come from different roots.
    - *Query* comes from the Latin root spelled *quer*, *quir*, or *ques* and meaning "ask or seek." We find this root in such words as *inquire*, *inquiry*, *question*, *quest*, and *request*.

    - *Querulous* comes from the Latin word *queror*, meaning "to complain." The related words *quarrel* and *quarrelsome* are derived from this same Latin word.

- To remember *querulous*, make a connection to someone you know who whines constantly. If you can't think of someone in your personal life, picture the most famous querulous, complaining figure in TV history: Oscar the Grouch from *Sesame Street*.

Maudlin (adjective)

Foolishly, tearfully, and weakly sentimental; overly emotional.

- *Maudlin* is derived from an alteration of the name *Mary Magdalene*, one of the most prominent women described in the New Testament. According to the Bible, she had seven demons cast out of her by Jesus, was present at his crucifixion, and was the first person to whom Jesus appeared after rising from the dead. In the Middle Ages, Mary Magdalene was often depicted in paintings as a weeping, repentant sinner. This tearful image led to the current figurative meaning of *maudlin*—overly sentimental.

- Synonyms and related words for *maudlin* and *sentimental* include *schmaltzy*, *gushing*, *drippy*, and *hokey*.

Mawkish (adjective)

Excessively and objectionably sentimental.

- *Mawkish* is another synonym for *maudlin*, but there is an important distinction in meaning between these two words. As described in *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms*, *mawkish* is an adjective that emphasizes the sickening nature of the sentiment. In other words, mawkish sentiment is often disgusting and sickening because it's so incredibly insincere or over the top.

- We can remember the sickening, disgusting connotation of *mawkish* from its etymology. *Mawkish* comes from the Middle English word *mawke*, which means "maggot."

Treacle (noun)

Cloying, sickly-sweet speech or sentiment.

- *Treacle* refers to excessively sweet sentiment, as seen in overly romantic movies or grocery-store greeting cards. *Treacle* can also refer to molasses or golden syrup, which is a thick, sweet mixture of molasses, corn syrup, and sugar used in cooking.

- The adjective form of *treacle* is *treacly*. Synonyms and related words include *cloying* and *saccharine*.

Scabrous (adjective)

1. Scabby, blotchy, and scaly.
2. Rough to the touch.
3. Indecent, shocking, scandalous.

- Although *scabrous* carries all three meanings listed above, it's often used to describe indecent, risqué, and obscene language and behavior. For example: "The intimate details of the late celebrity's scabrous diary shocked his family and ignited a scandal." Synonyms and related words for this sense of *scabrous* include *salacious*, *libidinous*, and *lascivious*.

- *Scabrous* originally came from the Latin adjective *scaber*, meaning "rough, scaly"; this word, in turn, was related to the Latin verb *scabo*, meaning "to scratch or scrape." Not surprisingly, *scabrous* is also related to *scab* and *scabies*.

Noisome (adjective)

Offensive to the point of arousing disgust; foul, particularly in reference to an odor.

- *Noisome* describes odors that are disgusting and distasteful; it also carries a second meaning of noxious, harmful, or unwholesome. Synonyms and related words for *noisome* include *loathsome*, *offensive*, *disgusting*, and to emphasize the decaying and rotting aspects of disgusting smells, *fetid* and *putrid*.

- It seems as if *noisome* must be related in some way to *noise*, but it's actually related to *annoy*.
  - According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary* (etymonline.com) and *The Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories*, the word *noise* comes from an Old French word spelled the same way that meant "din, disturbance, uproar, or brawl."

  - Interestingly, this French word came from the Latin *nausea*, literally meaning "seasickness," and the Latin word came from the Greek *nausia*, literally meaning "ship-sickness." The Greek root *naus* means "ship" and gives us such words as *astronaut* ("star sailor") and *navy*.

Fulsome (adjective)

1. Excessively or insincerely lavish.
2. Abundant.

- *Fulsome* is what the author, editor, and usage expert Bryan A. Garner calls a *skunked term*, that is, a word or term that is undergoing a change in meaning or usage or is currently disputed. This word also gives us a delightful example of how word meanings can shift over time.

- According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, originally, *fulsome* was a Middle English compound of the prefix *ful-*, meaning "full," and the suffix *-some*, meaning "tending to; to a considerable degree." These two parts combined to form the original mid-13th-century meaning of *fulsome*: "abundant, full" or, literally, "full to a considerable degree."
    - About 100 years later, the meaning of *fulsome* shifted to "plump, well-fed," and by the 1640s, it had taken on a negative connotation of "overgrown, overfed." By 1660, the literal meaning of *fulsome* as "overfed" was extended to a figurative meaning to describe language that was so overdone as to be "offensive to taste and good manners."

    - Most dictionaries currently define *fulsome* as an adjective meaning "excessively or insincerely lavish; offensive to good taste, especially as being grossly excessive."

    - But most modern dictionaries also include a usage note because the meaning of *fulsome* is currently changing once more. In fact, *fulsome* seems to be returning to its original positive meaning of "abundant."

- According to *Garner's Modern American Usage*, *fulsome* is at stage 4 of the Language Change Index. At this stage, "The form becomes virtually universal but is opposed on cogent grounds by a few linguistic stalwarts." Once a word reaches stage 4, the battle for linguistic purity is usually lost. At least for now, it seems as if the meaning "abundant" for *fulsome* is here to stay.

Review Questions

1. Left in your desk over the weekend, your pastrami sandwich might become ________.

2. Your coworker Bill constantly buzzes around the office, questioning your comments at last week's meeting and nitpicking the wording in your weekly sales report. What's a good word for this type of office pest?

3. A synonym for *maudlin*, this word carries a connotation of sickening or disgusting.

4. Your neighbor constantly complains about the inefficiency of the homeowner's association, late trash pick-ups, and delays in getting the roads plowed after a snowstorm. How might you describe this inveterate grouch?

5. This word is often used to describe sickly sweet sentiment resulting from drunkenness.

6. Chris and Sue recently began dating and call each other Cupcake and Popsy Bear. What's a good word for these overly sweet nicknames?

7. How might the phrase *fulsome praise* have both negative and positive connotations?

8. What word can be used to describe both a scandalous movie and a skin condition?

Fighting Words and Peaceful Words

Lecture 5

Think back to a time when you had a disagreement with someone. Was it just a tiff or an outright feud? How about a time when you were in a serious, possibly physical altercation—a fight that escalated into a fracas, a melee, or a donnybrook? English is replete with lively, hard-hitting words to describe different types of disagreements and disturbances, and in this lecture, we'll focus on such words. As a bonus, we'll also learn a few words that take us in the opposite direction—toward peaceful situations. As usual, we'll delve into the morphology and etymology of many of the words we encounter, including two high-utility Latin roots that relate to war and peace.

Donnybrook (noun)

A free-for-all; a brawl; a scene of disorder and uproar.

- *Donnybrook*'s etymological narrative is a gem: Donnybrook is a suburb of Dublin that was known for an annual fair that incited a number of no-holds-barred, drunken, riotous brawls. The situation became so bad that the fair was banned in 1855.

- *Donnybrook* also brings to mind a quote about the Irish people's fondness for fighting by the great English writer G. K. Chesterton: "The great Gaels of Ireland / Are the men that God made mad, / For all their wars are merry, / And all their songs are sad."

- Synonyms for *donnybrook* that usually imply more serious, possibly violent physical disagreements include the following:
    - *Melee*: a confused, rowdy fight.

    - *Fracas*: a noisy disturbance, a quarrel, an uproar, perhaps even a physical confrontation.

- *Row*: an upheaval, a free-for-all, a rumble.

© Purestock/Thinkstock.

An imbroglio implies a confused situation or misunderstanding, while a donnybrook connotes a physically violent brawl.

- In addition to words that describe more serious, possibly violent physical disagreements, English also has some wonderful words to describe lesser disagreements of a possibly gentler nature, such as: *at loggerheads*, *scrap*, *scuffle*, *flap*, *tussle*, *spat*, and *dustup*.

- You might want to organize these "fightin' words" in your vocabulary notebook into three categories: words referring to serious physical altercations, such as *melee* and *donnybrook*; words referring to less serious physical altercations, such as *tussle* and *scrap*; and words implying commotions and confused situations, such as *kerfuffle* and *imbroglio*.

- Earlier, we discussed a four-point scale of vocabulary knowledge; you may rate some of these words, such as *at loggerheads* and *dustup*, as 2s or 3s on that scale.
    - Such words are in the receptive vocabulary section of your mental lexicon, meaning that you've heard them and know what they mean, but they aren't in the expressive section of your lexicon—you don't necessarily use them often in speaking or writing.

    - That's a good reason to try out one of these words the next time you describe some type of altercation. Use *donnybrook* to describe a bench-clearing brawl you hear about at a baseball game, or try *hullabaloo* or *kerfuffle* for the commotion

that ensues when your annoying cousin makes yet another controversial comment at the next family reunion.

Imbroglio (noun)

1. A state of great confusion and entanglement; a complicated, difficult, or embarrassing situation.
2. A complex misunderstanding, disagreement, or dispute—sometimes of a bitter nature.

- *Imbroglio* comes from an Italian word that means "to confuse" and is related to the English word *embroiled*, which means "thrown into a state of confusion."

- Interestingly, *imbroglio* is also related to *broil*, *broth*, and *brew*. The spelling-meaning connection in English again provides us with a wonderful visual image to help us remember this word. When you see *im**bro**glio*, focus on the middle of the word and think of ***bro**il* and ***bro**th*. Visualizing a broiling broth with all the ingredients jumbled together will help you remember the distinguishing features of *imbroglio*—a confused, entangled mess.

- *Kerfuffle* is a synonym for *imbroglio* of Scot-Gaelic origin; it also refers to a commotion, controversy, or fuss. Other synonyms include *brouhaha*, *hullabaloo*, *hubbub*, and *hurly-burly*.

Bellicose (adjective)

Warlike, pugnacious, aggressively hostile.

- *Bellicose* shares the root *bell* with a number of other words, such as *belligerence*, *antebellum*, and *rebellion*. This root is from the Latin noun *bellum*, meaning "war."

- A good key word for the root *bell* is *rebellion*. The Latin prefix *re-* means "back or again," as in *redo*. Thus, a rebellion involves

rebels—people who have lost a war but want to "make war again" to overcome their conquerors.

- *Belligerent* is a close synonym for bellicose that shares the root *bell* and also means "warlike and aggressively hostile."

- *Antebellum* and *postbellum* are two other words derived from *bell*. The Latin prefix *ante*- means "before"; thus, *antebellum* means "before the war." The Latin prefix *post*- means "after"; thus, *postbellum* means "after the war."

Truculent (adjective)

Cruel, savage, brutal, and fierce; disposed to fighting; scathing and brutally harsh, often referring to verbal criticism.

Contumacious (adjective)

Stubbornly disobedient and rebellious to authority; willfully obstinate.

Rapacious (adjective)

Aggressively and excessively greedy or grasping; predatory.

- *Rapacious* doesn't just mean aggressive; it has the added connotation of greedy and grasping behavior. Here's a sentence that puts the word in context: "The rapacious company bought up all its smaller competitors until it had the monopoly on lollipops in North America."

- Synonyms for *rapacious* include *ravenous*, *voracious*, and *avaricious*. Use *rapacious* when you want to emphasize the greedy, devouring nature of aggression.

Halcyon (adjective)

Tranquil, calm, and peaceful; may refer to happy, joyful, and prosperous times.

- We often hear *halcyon* used along with such words as *days* and *times*, as in "The elders of the village spoke wistfully of the halcyon days of their youth," or "The halcyon times of peace and prosperity were a mere memory for the old woman who had to flee her homeland before the war." Words that frequently occur together in phrases, such as *halcyon days* and *halcyon times*, are called *collocates*.
    - Because words are born and live in context—not in isolated vocabulary lists—we need to examine how they actually behave in their natural environment—in the context of phrases and sentences.

    - When we study a word with its collocates, we get a deeper understanding of the word and are better equipped to actually use the word when we speak or write.

- In Greek mythology, Alcyone was the daughter of Aeolus, the god of the winds. She was turned into a bird, the halcyon or kingfisher, which some believed brooded its eggs on a floating nest. Remember the second syllable "see" in the word *halcyon*, and think of a peaceful sea with a bird tranquilly floating on it. This is a wonderful visual to help you remember the word *halcyon*.

Quiescent (adjective)

Tranquilly at rest, inactive, still, quiet, or motionless.

Propitiate (verb)

To appease; to make favorably inclined; to regain the favor of someone.

- *Propitiate* is often used in religious contexts, as in: "The priest propitiated the gods by sacrificing a fatted calf."

- Synonyms for propitiate include *mollify*, *dulcify*, *conciliate*, and *placate*.

A Peaceful Root

- Earlier in the lecture, we identified the Latin root *bell* (meaning "war") in such words as *belligerent* and *bellicose*.

- In contrast, *pac* is a Latin root meaning "peace" and can be found in such words as *pacify*, *pacifier*, *pacifist*, and *pacific*.

Mollycoddle (verb)

To overindulge; to treat with excessive attention to the point of spoiling someone.

- One of our themes in this lecture was aggression and cruelty. The opposite of being aggressive is to nurture or to pamper, but if pampering goes too far, it becomes mollycoddling.

- You can remember this word easily from its two parts: *molly* and *coddle*. *Coddle* means to indulge and treat tenderly. *Molly* was originally a term of contempt for a man who pampered himself too much.

Review Questions

1. How would you describe a bully, someone who is always spoiling for a fight?

2. This aggressive word carries the connotation of greedy, voracious, or predatory.

3. As we grow older, we often look back with fondness to the ____________ days of our youth.

4. What word could you use for a complicated, confusing love triangle, such as a situation you might see on a soap opera?

5. A husband who forgets his wedding anniversary might have to engage in this act to make amends to his wife.

6. This word sometimes refers to scathing or harsh criticism.

7. Parents who __________ their children may end up with __________ teenagers.

8. In ice hockey, a minor scrap between two players can quickly give way to a __________, clearing the benches of both teams.

9. This word is sometimes used to describe a state of dormancy in a medical condition.

Going beyond Dictionary Meanings

Lecture 6

At this point in the course, we've learned a number of interesting target words, such as *factitious*, *insidious*, and *donnybrook*. We've also discovered some principles for effective vocabulary learning: starting with clear definitions, placing the words in rich context, making connections, exploring morphology, and making use of semantic chunking. In this lecture, we'll look at some additional strategies for maintaining and deepening your knowledge of the vocabulary words you've already learned to ensure that you don't forget them in a week or a month. We'll also explore some engaging, effective ways to reinforce your vocabulary knowledge in just a few minutes each day.

Mnemonics: The Word-Part Connection Strategy

- Mnemonic strategies and devices are useful for remembering all sorts of information, including the definitions of new vocabulary words. *Mnemonic* is an adjective meaning "intended to assist the memory."
    - ○ All mnemonics are based on the same learning principle: associating something you already know or something that's easy to remember, such as an acronym, phrase, or rhyme, with something new that you're learning.

    - ○ You may not realize it, but you have probably used mnemonics throughout your life. For example, many people remember the order of operations in mathematics—powers, multiplication, division, addition, subtraction—with the phrase *Please My Dear Aunt Sally*. The acronym *ROY G. BIV* is useful for recalling the sequence of colors in a rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet.

- The "go-to" mnemonic device for learning vocabulary definitions is the *word-part connection* strategy, which works as follows:
    - First, read the target word out loud.

    - Second, analyze the word to see if any part of it reminds you of something else you already know.

    - Third, associate that "something else" with the target word's meaning.

Castigate (verb)

To punish, rebuke, or criticize severely.

- Let's try the word-part connection strategy with the word *castigate*.

- A smaller word inside *castigate* is *cast*, meaning "to throw or hurl." This definition might lead us to a memorable image of one person throwing criticisms on another.

- To make this word-part connection in your vocabulary notebook, circle or highlight the *cast* in *castigate* and jot down the connection. If you like visual images, you could draw a simple stick figure of a person, casting the words *rebuke* and *criticism* at another stick figure. If you prefer words to visual images, you could simply write down the connection in your own words, as in, "When you castigate someone, you are casting punishments and criticisms."

Toothsome (adjective)

Delicious; sexually attractive.

- Toothsome is another word that lends itself to the word-part connection strategy. Obviously, a smaller word that pops out from *toothsome* is *tooth*. Making a connection between *tooth* and the

“delicious” meaning of *toothsome* seems relatively simple: We can simply visualize teeth chewing a delicious meal. For the “sexually attractive” meaning, we might visualize an attractive model or celebrity with a perfect toothy smile.

- Interestingly, this connection is related to the etymology of *toothsome*, which came into English in the 1560s from a combination of the word *tooth* and the suffix -*some*. In this word, *tooth* was used in a figurative sense of “appetite, taste, or liking,” as in *sweet tooth*. When combined with -*some*, an adjective-forming suffix that means “tending to, causing, to a considerable degree,” *toothsome* meant “considerably tasty and appetizing.” The word was later extended to describe a person who looks delicious.

- When looking for a familiar word part to serve as a trigger for a mnemonic device, it’s often the case that you will be digging into the etymology of the word without even knowing it. Further, you’ll find that the etymology and morphology of words—their history and structure—are often the best built-in mnemonic devices for learning new vocabulary.

Captious (adjective)

Faultfinding; hypercritical; difficult to please.

- The word-part connection strategy is helpful for learning definitions, but definitions alone don’t lead to deep vocabulary knowledge. One way to move beyond the dictionary definition is to use a graphic organizer, such as the four-square concept map developed by educational researchers to visually record information about a new word. Below is a four-square concept map for the word *captious*.

captious

Part of Speech, Definition: adjective faultfinding, hypercritical, difficult to please	Synonyms: finicky, hypercritical, crabby, cross, testy carping, acrimonious, cantankerous
Examples: Hypercritical aunt or uncle Busybody at work English professor	Non-Examples, Antonyms: Mom complimentary, encouraging

- The top-left quadrant is used to record the definition and part of speech, along with any connections you might make with the target word. In our example, *captious* is an adjective that means "faultfinding, hypercritical, difficult to please." The *capt* part of *captious* might lead you to think of *capture*, and it might be helpful to remember that you would never want to be captured by a captious person.

- The top-right quadrant is used to record synonyms, including both words you know well—to anchor your knowledge of the new word—and, perhaps, some new synonyms that you find by looking in a thesaurus.

- In the bottom-left quadrant, record personal examples of the word. In this case, you might identify people you know who are captious, such as a relative or your boss.

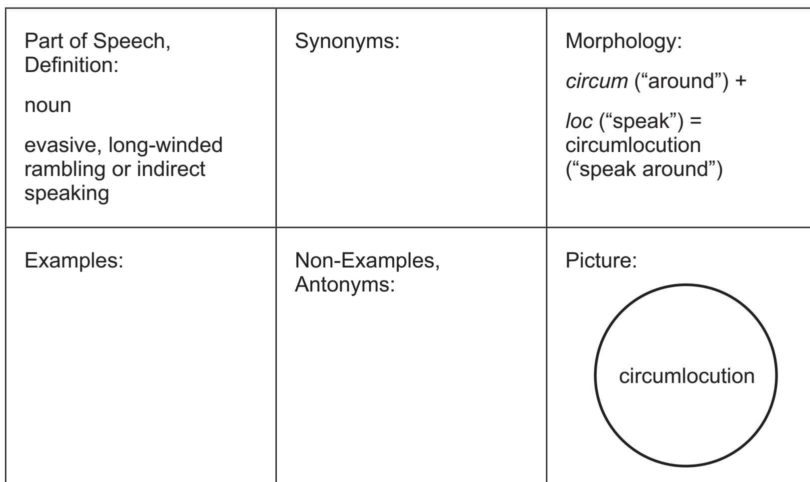
- Finally, in the bottom-right quadrant, record non-examples and antonyms of the word. Often, when you're trying to learn what a concept is, it's helpful to know what it's not.

Circumlocution (noun)

Evasive, long-winded rambling or indirect speech.

- You can also add more information to a concept map, such as boxes for morphology and a picture, as shown in the following example for *circumlocution*.

circumlocution



Part of Speech, Definition: noun evasive, long-winded rambling or indirect speaking	Synonyms:	Morphology: *circum* ("around") + *loc* ("speak") = circumlocution ("speak around")
Examples:	Non-Examples, Antonyms:	Picture: circumlocution

Flash Cards

- Flash cards are a standby of vocabulary learning that can be used in a number of ways. Of course, the traditional approach is to write a word on one side of an index card and the definition on the other side. You can then review vocabulary by looking at the word, reading it out loud, articulating the definition in your own words, and checking yourself by turning the card over. You can also reverse this process; try to identify the target words by their definitions.

- Flash cards can be even more effective if you include additional information beyond the definition. For example, you might draw a

four-square concept map on the back of your vocabulary cards. You will then have each word's definition, its synonyms and antonyms, and examples and non-examples all in one place. When reviewing each word, see if you can recite all the information on the back of the card before checking yourself. You might also draw memorable pictures on the backs of your cards or include phonetic spellings.

- A fun game to play with flash cards is "Connect 2," an activity developed by vocabulary researchers and educators Blachowicz and Fisher. Simply pick two cards out of the deck and see if you can connect them in a sentence.
    - For example, let's say you picked *mountebank* and *imbroglio*. If you remember, a mountebank is a flamboyant charlatan, a swindler who arrives in the town marketplace, "mounts a bench," and tries to sell quack medicines and cures to an unsuspecting crowd. An imbroglio is a complicated, confused situation or a bitter misunderstanding.

    - You might connect these two words in the following sentence: "The mountebank swindled half the town out of their hard-earned savings, creating quite an imbroglio in the community that lasted for weeks."

    - "Connect 2" encourages you to apply your word knowledge in speaking or writing while making deep connections among words.

- If you don't like flash cards or don't have time to make them, you can organize your vocabulary notebook into the traditional Cornell two-column note system, as shown below. To review with this system, simply cover up the right column with a piece of paper and quiz yourself in the same way that you would with flash cards.

Target word	Definitions, personal connections, pictures, morphology, four-square concept map, and so on

Putting Words to Work

- As we've said, words exist in context, not in vocabulary books or lists. Thus, you need to actually use the words you learn, or you'll lose them.

- One easy activity for using words in context is to simply write each target word in a sentence in your vocabulary notebook. Use sample sentences from a dictionary as models, and try to make your sentences rich enough in context so that when you read back over them, they help you remember the target words.

- Another activity for using words in context is to choose one or two target words to use in conversation each day.

Cramming on the Farm

- Almost all of us have had the experience of staying up all night to "cram" for a major test. You may have managed to pass the test, but how much of that information that you frantically studied did you remember by the following week?

- Imagine that you're a farmer. Could you cram on the farm in the same way that you crammed for that exam? In other words, could you do nothing all spring and summer; wait until the day before the fall harvest; then quickly plant and water the seeds, hope for sunlight, and harvest the crop the next day? Of course, the answer is no. If farmers tried to cram all their work in at once, they'd never survive.

- The point here is this: Real long-term learning, like farming, is a natural process that takes time. Cramming won't help you achieve it. What will help, however, is to do a little bit of learning every day. Choose one target vocabulary word and use one of the activities in this lecture to dig a little deeper into that word. Just a few minutes a day can make a big difference over a lifetime of vocabulary learning.

Review Questions

1. Try the word-part connection strategy with the word *reparable*.

2. Draw a four-square concept map for the word *abysmal*.

3. This word has an interesting etymology; it was originally used figuratively to mean “appetite” or “taste,” but its meaning was later extended to describe a person who looks delicious.

4. The teacher __________ her students sharply for not doing their homework.

5. This word meaning “long-winded speech” shares a connection with *circumference*, the measurement of a circle.

6. The older he got, the more __________ the already cantankerous Uncle Frank became.

Wicked Words

Lecture 7

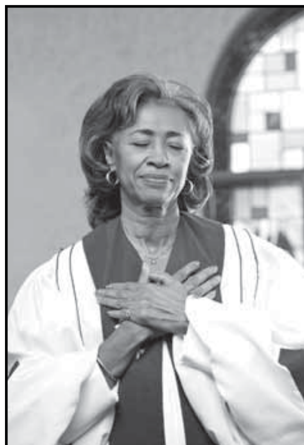
According to the Irish political theorist and philosopher Edmund Burke, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” Just as there are many types and degrees of evil, there are also many words in English to describe various aspects of wickedness. In this lecture, we’ll learn some of them. We’ll also answer some intriguing questions about wicked words: Would you want to be called a snollygoster? Which do you have to confess, a venal sin or a venial one? Finally, would a secret plot to overthrow a benevolent queen, a plot that evolved over a number of years, best be described as invidious or insidious?

Malediction (noun)

A curse; evil talk about someone; slander.

- The first three letters of *malediction* make up a prefix, *mal*-, that comes from the Latin word *malus*, meaning “bad, badly, or evil.” The second part of the word is *diction*, which can refer to the distinctiveness of pronunciation in speech. In fact, the Latin root *dic* or *dict* means “speak.” Thus, if we attach the Latin prefix *mal*- to the root *dict*, we get “evil speech”—a curse.

- The counterpoint to *mal*- is another Latin root, *bene*, which means “good” or “well.” A *benediction* is, literally, “good speech,” an expression of good wishes. *Benediction* and *malediction* are antonyms.



© Hill Street Studios/Blend Images/Thinkstock.

***Benediction* often refers to a short blessing given by an officiating minister at the end of a religious service.**

- Our key word for *mal*- is *malfunction*, meaning "to function badly or to stop functioning." As we've learned in past lectures, key words are known words that are useful for unlocking the meaning of and remembering many unknown words that are derived from the same root.

- A large number of English words contain the prefix *mal*-. Below are a few examples:
    - Malign (verb): to speak evil of; to say harmful things that are untrue; to slander. The silent *g* in *malign* represents another good example of the spelling-meaning connection we discussed in Lecture 2. That *g* serves as a visual clue that *malign* is related to *malignant*. Word pairs that contain such visual clues are common in English and are known as *silent/ sounded consonant pairs*.

    - Malignant (adjective): dangerous or harmful.

    - Malevolent (adjective): evil, harmful; wishing evil or harm.

    - Malice (noun): a desire to injure or harm another.

    - Malware (noun): software intended to do harm to a computer, such as a computer virus.

Malcontent (noun)

A person who is chronically dissatisfied.

- If you weren't familiar with *malcontent*, you could use the related-words strategy to help you determine its meaning. Look for a word or word part that you already know within the unknown word. In this case, you could identify *content*, and your knowledge of *mal*- would help you arrive at the definition: "badly content," or a person who is never contented.

- To remember *malcontent*, make a connection to a person you know who is always complaining, and write that person's name down in your vocabulary notebook next to the word *malcontent*.

- A great synonym for a complainer or whiner is a *kvetcher*. *Kvetch* is an Americanism from Yiddish that literally means "to squeeze, pinch, or press." Visualize yourself being squeezed or pinched by the constant complaints of a malcontent.

Malaise (noun)

A vague or indefinite feeling of unease or discomfort.

- An easy way to remember *malaise* is by morphological analysis, that is, breaking the word down by meaning part. We already know that *mal*- means "bad." The second part of the word, *aise*, is related to the English word *ease*. Thus, *malaise* is the condition of being "ill at ease."

- In the newspaper, you may see the phrase "economic malaise," referring to an economy that is stagnant or in recession. Such an economy probably reflects the fact that consumers, businesses, and investors may be vaguely ill at ease about the future.

Maladroit (adjective)

Awkward, clumsy, tactless, or bungling.

- Thousands of words have been and continue to be created in our language by the combination of prefixes, suffixes, roots, and base words. *Maladroit* is a perfect example.
    - Someone who is *adroit* is skilled, agile and clever, or resourceful. People can be adroit physically, such as dancers, or adroit in other areas, such as politicians, who might be clever and resourceful in working the system to further their own agendas.

    - If we add the prefix *mal-* to *adroit*, we get maladroit, an adjective meaning badly skilled or badly agile—in other words, awkward or bungling.

- To remember this word, take a moment to make your own connection. Think of someone you know who is maladroit in some way or perhaps an instance in your own life when you may not have been as adroit as you would have liked. Be sure to write this connection in your vocabulary notebook.

Malefactor (noun)

A criminal; a person who violates the law.

- Dividing the word *malefactor* into three parts helps us remember it: *mal-* ("evil") + *fac* ("make or do") + *-or* (suffix indicating agency). Combining these three parts gives us *malefactor*—literally, "someone who does evil."

- Another strategy for remembering words is to contrast them with their opposites. If you know that the prefix *bene-* means "good," you know that a benefactor is someone who does good, such as a patron or supporter. *Benefactor* is the opposite of *malefactor*.

- Lively synonyms for *malefactor* include *criminal*, *scoundrel*, *scalawag*, *knave*, *cad*, *desperado*, *scofflaw*, *reprobate*, and *snollygoster*. This last word, *snollygoster*, meaning "a shrewd, unprincipled person," was recently removed from *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* because it is now considered archaic.

Malfeasance (noun)

An illegal or harmful act, usually committed by a public official, that violates the public trust.

Malinger (verb)

To fake or exaggerate illness, usually to avoid work.

Venal (adjective)

Open to corruption; capable of being bought through bribery.

- *Venal* is derived from the Latin *venum*, meaning "something for sale." Related English words include *vendor* and *vending*, either of which can be used as a key word for *venal*. Just as these words relate to selling, *venal* describes describe corrupt people who are willing to sell their influence for money.

- *Venal* is often confused with *venial*, which means "forgivable, pardonable, minor," as in a "venial sin" as opposed to a mortal sin.

Insidious (adjective)

Intended to entrap, ensnare, or beguile; stealthily treacherous or deceitful.

- Here again, etymology helps with remembering the word *insidious*. This word is derived from the Latin *insidere*, meaning "to sit in or on." Thus, *insidious* is used to describe a type of evil that works on the inside—an inside job that is secret, stealthy, and harmful.

- Pulling out the first five letters of *insidious* yields *insid*, which looks almost like *inside* and serves as a built-in mnemonic for recalling this word.

Invidious (adjective)

Creating ill will, envy; causing resentment; unfairly or offensively discriminating.

- Just as we did with *insidious*, we can use the spelling-meaning connection to help remember *invidious*. This word comes from the Latin *invidia*, meaning "envy." When you see *invidious*, focus

on the *nv* in both *invidious* and *envy* to serve as a reminder that invidious comments ignite envy and ill will in others.

Turpitude (noun)

Baseness, depravity, or debauchery.

Review Questions

1. In the news these days, we often read about politicians who have committed __________.

2. How would you describe a police officer who decides not to give a speeding ticket to a driver after he has been offered a bribe?

3. An utterance pronounced to bring harm to someone is a __________.

4. This word is often used in the military to characterize the behavior of soldiers who try to avoid work by pretending to be sick.

5. One of the few acts that can result in dismissal for a tenured professor is moral __________.

6. What might you call a vague feeling of unease, a sense that something's wrong but you can't quite put your finger on it?

7. This word describes someone who is clumsy and inept, the exact opposite of skilled and clever.

8. This person is the opposite of a benefactor.

9. This word describes a law that discriminates against a particular group of individuals.

10. A chronic complainer or whiner is a __________.

11. How might you characterize a disease that slowly and secretly causes harm?

Words for Beginnings and Endings

Lecture 8

In his famous "To be, or not to be" soliloquy, Hamlet, contemplating death and suicide, utters the following words, which have lived on in Western literature: "To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub; / For in that sleep of death what dreams may come / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, / Must give us pause." "Shuffle off this mortal coil" has since become one of the most well-known, poetic phrases for death. This lecture focuses on words relating to death, dying, and endings, as well as birth, growing, and beginnings. The lecture also looks at absorbed prefixes, which help explain some of the seeming idiosyncrasies in English spelling.

Nascent (adjective)

Emerging, developing, coming into existence, forming.

- *Nascent* can be used to describe the birth of anything, including an idea, a newly formed group, or a movement. For example: "Her nascent idea for a new software application wasn't completely thought out yet, but it had such incredible potential that investors were already lining up."

- Synonyms for *nascent* include *incipient*, *burgeoning*, *embryonic*, *fledgling*, and *evolving*.

- *Nascent* comes from the Latin root *nasc*, which in turn comes from the Latin word *nascor*, meaning "to be born." Another root from this Latin verb is *nat*. Related words that share this root and have something to do with birth include *nativity*, *natal*, *prenatal*, *innate*, *native*, and *neonatal*.

Inchoate (adjective)

> **1.** Not completely formed or developed; only partly in existence.
> **2.** Not organized; lacking order.

- Both *nascent* and *inchoate* refer to the beginning stages of something, but *inchoate*, depending on how it's used, sometimes emphasizes what is not present in the beginning stages, focusing on the more "lacking" aspects of a beginning. This is in contrast to *nascent*, which could stress the more developing, growing, positive aspects of the beginning stages.

- To see how *inchoate* might be used differently than *nascent*, compare the earlier context sentence for *nascent* and an adaptation that uses *inchoate*:

  "Her nascent idea for a new software application wasn't completely thought out yet, but it had such potential that investors were already lining up."

  "Her inchoate idea for a new software application wasn't completely thought out yet, which meant that she had a lot of work to do before investors lined up."

Callow (adjective)

> Immature or inexperienced; lacking adult sophistication.

- *Callow* is used to describe people who don't have much life experience or don't know how to behave like adults, as in the phrase *callow youth*.

- Synonyms for *callow* include *immature*, *untried*, *green*, *raw*, *unfledged*, and *unripened*.

- *Callow* comes from the Old English word *calu*, meaning "bare, bald," which was sometimes applied to young birds with no

feathers. This meaning has been extended to encompass the idea of inexperience.

Dilettante (noun)

A dabbler in the arts or some field of knowledge; often used in a pejorative sense.

- The word *dilettante* generally refers to an amateur who has only a superficial knowledge of something but tries to come across as knowing more than he or she actually does.

- Synonyms and related words for *dilettante* include *amateur*, *dabbler*, *layperson*, *do-it-yourselfer*, *nonprofessional*, *rookie*, and if you want to emphasize the "imposter" aspect of a dilettante, *poser* and *pretender*.

- When English borrowed *dilettante* from Italian in the early 1700s, it originally meant "lover of music or painting." However, the word took on its current negative connotation by the late 1700s.

Tyro (noun)

A beginner or novice.

- *Tyro* seems to be an unfamiliar word for many people. Putting it in a context sentence may help you to remember it: "Under the legendary fly-fishing guide's expert mentoring, even a fly-fishing tyro like me would be able to land a trout in this stream."

- *Tyro* can also be used as an adjective, as in: "The tyro teacher knew her subject but lacked classroom management skills; her students were completely unruly when the principal walked in for her first observation."

- Synonyms and related words for *tyro* include *beginner*, *rookie*, *neophyte*, *abecedarian*, *tenderfoot*, and *greenhorn*.

- ○ *Tenderfoot* was coined in the 1800s to refer to new immigrants to the United States who weren't used to the hardships of ranching and mining. The word can be used for any beginner, but in particular, it refers to one unused to the hardships of the outdoors.

- ○ *Greenhorn* refers to an inexperienced person, particularly one who is gullible.

© shironosov/iStock/Thinkstock.

The word *abecedarian* comes from the first letters of the alphabet; to remember it, think of children learning their abc's.

- It's not uncommon to confuse *tyro* and *dilettante*, but the two are not exact synonyms. Remember, a dilettante is a dabbler in different subjects, and the word can carry the pejorative connotation of someone who is a pretender or a poser. *Tyro* does not carry this same "pretender" connotation.

Ingénue (noun)

1. An innocent, naïve girl or young woman.
2. A stock innocent character in a movie or play or the actress playing such a character.

Puerile (adjective)

Juvenile, childishly silly, foolish.

- *Puerile* is often used in a negative, pejorative sense to describe juvenile humor, antics, or silliness, as in: "After sitting on a whoopee cushion and hearing inappropriate noises made by his students, the teacher called for an end to the puerile humor, warning of severe consequences."

- The etymology for this word is straightforward and helpful: *Puerile* comes from the Latin *puer*, meaning "boy or male child," and as we all know, boys can certainly be silly.

Moribund (adjective)

> **1.** Approaching death; coming to an end.
>
> **2.** No longer effective or active; stagnant; not progressing or advancing.

- *Moribund* comes from the Latin word *morior*, which means "to die." This same Latin verb also gives us the fertile root *mort*. The following words are derived from this powerful root: *mortal*, *immortal*, *mortality*, *mortuary*, *postmortem*, *mortify*, and *rigor mortis*.

- *Immortal* is an interesting example to illustrate the concept of absorbed prefixes.
    - As mentioned in an earlier lecture, English has created and continues to create thousands of new words by combining Latin and Greek affixes, roots, and base words. For example, the word *preview* was created by adding the prefix *pre*-, meaning "before," to the word *view*. Of course, to preview something is to look at it beforehand.

    - In the same way, *immortal* was created by adding the prefix *in*-, meaning "not," to *mortal*. However, it's almost impossible to pronounce "inmortal." Thus, over time, the *n* in the prefix *in*- was absorbed, or assimilated, into the initial *m* of the base word, *mortal*, yielding "immortal." The same process took place with *immature*, *immaterial*, *immodest*, *immoral*, and *immovable*.

    - We keep the first *m* in the spelling of these words to remind ourselves that *im*- is an alternative form of the *in*- prefix, meaning "not." If we eliminated the first *m*, we'd lose an

important visual clue to the meaning of these words. In this way, the spelling helps us to remember meaning.

- The absorbed prefix phenomenon is also seen in such words as *irrational* (rather than *inrational*), *irreconcilable*, *irregular*, *irrelevant*, *irresistible*, and *irresponsible*, as well as *illogical* (rather than *inlogical*), *illegal*, *illiterate*, *illegible*, and *illegitimate*.

Review Questions

1. Middle school students, particularly boys, are known for their __________ behavior.

2. Explain the difference in meaning between *inchoate* and *nascent*.

3. With the advent of the Internet, the newspaper industry has become ________.

4. Although Rich bragged about his photography skills, his work showed that he was a __________ behind the lens.

5. The young actress Pam was thrilled to get the role of the __________ in the community center's spring production.

6. A __________ by nature, Catherine had dabbled in pottery, painting, sculpture, and dance.

7. Mark's __________ disregard for Jennifer's feelings revealed his immaturity.

Words Expressing Fear, Love, and Hatred

Lecture 9

In this lecture, we'll look at three powerful emotions: love, hate, and fear. Of these, fear may be the most interesting, partly because it comes in so many varieties. There's the stupefying panic you feel when you've committed a misdeed in the eyes of your parents. There's the delicious spine-tingling terror of watching the main character in a horror movie head up to the attic to track down a mysterious noise. And there's fear that's a kind of reverence for something that is awe-inspiring, powerful, or overwhelming, reflected in the phrase *the fear of God*. In this lecture, we'll explore a variety of fears and words for fears, along with some interesting terms related to love and hate.

Xenophobia (noun)

An unreasonable hatred or fear of foreigners or strangers; a fear of that which is foreign or strange.

- *Xeno* is a Greek root that means "strange, foreign." A xenophobe is usually a person in the "in-group" who may be afraid of losing his or her power or identity to others who are perceived as different or foreigners.

- We often encounter *xenophobia* in news articles dealing with immigration and nationalism. For example: "Although the new policy is more welcoming to newly arrived immigrants, we need to remain vigilant against the stirrings of xenophobia."

Agoraphobia (noun)

Abnormal fear of open or public spaces.

- In ancient Greek cities, the *agora* was an open area or central marketplace in a city, where citizens could assemble for various

social, commercial, and religious activities. From this word, we get *agoraphobia*, meaning a fear of open or public spaces.

© Fuse/Thinkstock.

Glossophobia, or fear of public speaking, is a common fear, but experts recommend that preparation and relaxation exercises may help sufferers overcome it.

Glossophobia (noun)

Unreasonable fear of speaking in public.

- *Gloss* or *glot* are two roots derived from the Greek word *glossa*, meaning "tongue." This root is also seen in *polyglot*, a person who can speak many languages, as well as *glottis*, *epiglottis*, and *glottal*.

Acrophobia (noun)

Abnormal fear of heights.

- *Acrophobia* comes from the Greek *akros*, meaning "at the end, the top, height, summit, or tip." Related words include *acrobatics* and *acropolis*, a high, fortified area of a city.

Other Phobias

- We might think of phobias and the roots from which they acquire their names as similar to gateway drugs. Studying just one phobia can lead to a multitude of other affixes and roots.

- *Claustrophobia*, as most of us know, is the morbid fear of being shut up in a confined space. This word was coined in 1879 by Dr. Benjamin Ball and comes from the Latin *claustrum*, which means, "a bolt, a means of closing; a place shut in, confined place, frontier fortress." *Claustrophobia* is related to the word *cloister*, a monastery that is "closed off" to the laity.

- Other phobias that you may or may not have heard of include *arachnophobia*, "fear of spiders"; *technophobia*, "fear of technology"; *logophobia*, "fear of words" (Greek *logos*: "word, reason, speech, thought"); panophobia, "fear of everything" (Greek *pan*: "all"); *bibliophobia*, "fear of books"; *triskaidekaphobia*, "fear of the number 13"; and *coulrophobia*, "fear of clowns."

Phil and *Amor*: Two Roots for "Love"

- The Greek root spelled *phil* or *phile* means "love or friendship." Words derived from this root include *Philadelphia*, "the city of brotherly love"; *Anglophile*, "lover of England"; *Francophile*, "lover of France"; *bibliophile*, "lover of books"; *philharmonic*, "loving music"; and *philosophy*, "love of wisdom."

- The Latin root for "love," *am* or *amor*, can also be found in many English words, such as *amorous*, *enamored*, and *paramour*.

Oenophile (noun)

A connoisseur or lover of wine.

Philatelist (noun)

A person or studies or collects stamps.

Canoodle (verb)

1. To kiss and cuddle; pet, caress; fondle.
2. To coax; persuade or cajole; wheedle.

- The first meaning of *canoodle* is the one we encounter most frequently, as in: "It seems as if the main purpose of some of today's reality TV is to show various couples canoodling." The second meaning might appear in this context: "His success as a lobbyist could be attributed to his ability to canoodle politicians."

- The origin of *canoodle* is uncertain; however, we know that it was an American slang word in usage as far back as the 1850s. One apocryphal story behind *canoodle* is that it started as Oxford University slang during Victorian or Edwardian times, used to refer to a situation in which an amorous young couple would use a canoe and a paddle to get away from a chaperone. It seems unlikely, though, that much in the way of amorous behavior would be possible in a canoe.

Misanthrope (noun)

Someone who hates and distrusts all people.

- The prefix *mis*- in *misanthrope* is from the Greek verb *misein*, meaning "to hate," and the root *anthrop* is from the noun *anthropos*, meaning "man." Thus, a misanthrope is literally "a hater of mankind." There is also another noun form of this word, *misanthropy*, which refers to hatred or distrust of all humans.

- Other words derived from *mis-* or *miso-* ("hate") include *misogyny* ("hatred of women") and *misandry* ("hatred of men").

Execrate (verb)

1. To damn or denounce scathingly; curse.

2. To detest utterly, abhor, abominate, loathe.

- The words *execrate*, *curse*, *damn*, and *anathematize* are all synonyms meaning to denounce violently and indignantly. However, these words carry finer nuances in meaning that can help you differentiate which word to use in different contexts.
  - Use *execrate* when you want to stress a denunciation filled with intense loathing, hatred, and passionate fury.

- ○ *Curse* and *damn* both suggest angry denunciation by blasphemous oaths. *Curse* sometimes comes across as a bit more literary than *damn*.

- ○ Use *anathematize* to describe a more formal, solemn, impassioned denunciation or condemnation, such as a denunciation by a priest from the pulpit. *Anathematize* is the verb form of the noun *anathema*, meaning, "something that is hated."

- *Execrate* comes from the Latin prefix *ex*-, meaning "out of, from, away," and the Latin word *sacro*, meaning "to devote to, to mark as sacred." Thus, *execrate* is literally "to take the sacred away," or to curse.

Review Questions

1. This word describes a person who has a small wine cellar and enjoys traveling to local vineyards.

2. The comedian Woody Allen is credited with saying, "I'm not anti-social. I'm just not social." He might be described as a __________.

3. A dedicated __________, Sandy had been collecting stamps since she was a child.

4. Holding the phobia support group in the vast auditorium—capable of seating 500 people—on the 50th floor of a skyscraper discouraged the attendance of those suffering from __________, __________, and __________.

5. The citizens came to __________ the mayor after his underhanded dealings were made public.

6. Teenagers are known for __________ in movie theaters and parked cars.

7. After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, __________ became more pronounced around the country.

Words for the Everyday and the Elite

Lecture 10

Mark Twain once said, "When red-headed people are above a certain social grade their hair is auburn." This quote highlights the fact that the words we choose tell a great deal about ourselves as speakers. Those who want to project the image of a "regular guy" choose different vocabulary than those who want to come across as members of the upper crust. And that difference brings us to two of the themes we'll explore in this lecture—words that relate to the commonplace and the elite. We'll also look at words for things that are so commonplace as to become dull and flat.

Insipid (adjective)

Bland and lacking in flavor; lacking in interesting, exciting, or stimulating qualities.

- *Insipid* is often used to describe food, as in the following sentence: "The novice chef left the roast in the oven too long, cooking out all the spices and rendering the meat insipid." But the word can also apply to anything that lacks interest or excitement; for example: "The insipid, overly defensive style of both soccer teams resulted in a nil-nil draw and the most boring match the fans had seen in years."

- Synonyms for *insipid* include *tasteless*, *bland*, and *flat*.

Vapid (adjective)

Completely lacking in zest, spirit, animation, and liveliness.

- You understand the meaning of *vapid* if you've ever had the experience of talking to someone who is completely dull and lifeless. You try to stick with the conversation for 10 minutes or so, but at the end of that time, you secretly wish you could regain those 10 minutes of your life.

- To remember *vapid*, highlight *vap* and think of the related word *vapor*; in fact, *vapid* comes from the Latin *vapidus*, meaning "that has exhaled its vapor." *Vapid* was originally used in English in a literal sense to describe stale beverages that had lost their flavor, or vapor. Over time, however, *vapid* added a broader, more figurative connotation to describe anything that is lacking in zest and spirit.

- *Vapid* and *insipid* are closely related synonyms that both mean lacking interesting or exciting qualities, but there is a slight difference in connotation. *Insipid* emphasizes a lack of sufficient taste or savor to please or interest, whereas *vapid* stresses a lack of vitality, life, liveliness, force, or spirit.
    - If you want to emphasize dullness due to a lack of taste or interest, *insipid* might be the right choice. If, however, you want to emphasize dullness due to lack of zest, spirit, and life, *vapid* might work better.

    - For example, a meal can be insipid but not vapid. A conversation can be either, depending on what aspect of its supreme dullness you want to call attention to.

Prosaic (adjective)

1. Dull, lacking in imagination, matter-of-fact.
2. Commonplace, everyday, ordinary.

- Like *insipid* and *vapid*, *prosaic* can mean "dull," but it emphasizes dullness as a result of lack of imagination. For example: "Often, science writing can be prosaic, simply delivering information in a lifeless, unimaginative, 'just the facts, ma'am' style."

- The "commonplace, everyday, ordinary" meaning of *prosaic* appears in the following sentence: "The seemingly prosaic lives of our immigrant ancestors, who worked tirelessly in the steel mills, belie the heroic sacrifices they made for their descendants."

- To remember the meaning of *prosaic*, think of prose writing, which we tend to consider less creative and imaginative than poetry. Prose transmits information in a straightforward manner.

Quotidian (adjective)

Daily, customary, ordinary, usual.

- *Quotidian* describes the mundane, unexciting things that we all do routinely, such as washing the dishes, making the bed, and going to work.

- You can use *quotidian* to emphasize the everyday, regular nature of something, such as a quotidian routine, or you can use it to emphasize the mundane, commonplace, nature of something, such as the quotidian talent of an average artist.

- One way to remember *quotidian* is to highlight the last part of the word, *dian*, which comes from the Latin word *dies*, meaning "day." This connection gives us the "daily" meaning in *quotidian*.

- Synonyms for *quotidian* include *everyday*, *garden variety*, *frequent*, *common*, and *routine*.

Hoi Polloi (noun)

The ordinary masses; the common people.

- Many people confuse *hoi polloi* with *hoity-toity*, which refers to people who think they are better or smarter than others. For this reason, people often think that *hoi polloi* refers to the elite, rich, and famous. But actually, *hoi polloi* means the opposite of *elite*; it refers to the ordinary masses.

- *Hoi polloi* is a transliteration of two Greek words that literally mean "the many." It's often used as a derogatory term by elitist snobs to refer to the great unwashed masses.

- *Polloi*, meaning "many," is related to the Greek root *poly*, which also means "many or much" and appears in such words as *polygon* and *polygamist*. In your vocabulary notebook, highlight the *pol* in *polloi* and relate it to a polygon, a figure with many sides; this will help you remember that *hoi polloi* refers to the many—the common people.

- Some linguistic purists object to the phrase *the hoi polloi* because *hoi* means "the" in Greek. According to this reasoning, when we say, "the hoi polloi," we're being redundant, literally saying, "the the many." However, *the hoi polloi* has become an acceptable phrase in English.

Banal (adjective)

Lacking freshness and originality; trite; commonplace; so ordinary as to have become tedious.

- *Banal* is a great word to describe the clichés you might read in a trashy western novel: a cowboy who is "rough around the edges" but has a "heart of gold" and "nerves of steel." *Banal* is often used alongside such collocates as *comments*, *observations*, and *remarks*.

- Synonyms for *banal* include *trite*, *stale*, *threadbare*, and *hackneyed*. This last word is derived from *hack*, someone who writes anything for hire. You can imagine a hack, writing on a deadline and using tired, worn-out phrases and clichés because he or she doesn't have the time to come up with anything original or fresh.

Bromide (noun)

A platitude or trite saying.

- Bromides are similar to clichés and seem to appear frequently in sports contexts, as in: "That player gives 110 percent"; "We kept our eye on the ball"; and "There is no *i* in *team*."

- *Bromide* originally referred to a sedative, specifically, a chemical compound of bromine and another metal. Of course, sedatives deaden and dull the senses, leading to the more figurative meaning of *bromide*: trite sayings that have become so overused they deaden our senses.

Patrician (noun/adjective)

noun:

1. Someone of refined upbringing, manners, and taste.

2. An aristocrat; a person of high rank or social class.

adjective: People or things that have the characteristics of the upper class.

- The use of *patrician* as a noun is shown in the following sentence: "The city's patricians used to have most of the money and power, but the growth of the middle class has all but ended that era in history." *Patrician* as an adjective appears in this sentence: "Her patrician tastes in music and dining were apparent from her frequent trips to the opera, the symphony orchestra, and only the finest restaurants in town."

- The patricians were members of the original aristocratic families of ancient Rome. In contrast to the patrician class was the plebeian or working class. Today, *plebeian* is used as an antonym for *patrician* to refer to something that is common, lower class, or vulgar.

Nonpareil (adjective)

Without peer; having no equal.

- *Nonpareil* comes from the 15th-century French words *non* (meaning "not") and *pareil* (meaning "equal"). Combining these two yields "not equal," meaning someone or something that is without equal.

- Synonyms for *nonpareil* include *matchless*, *peerless*, *inimitable*, *unrivaled*, *unsurpassed*, and *incomparable*.

Review Questions

1. Are the hoi polloi generally considered to be patrician?

2. The CEO's speech did nothing to inspire her employees; she offered only the usual __________ about keeping their noses to the grindstones and their eyes on the bottom line.

3. Blakely's culinary skills were legendary among her friends; her *boeuf bourguignon* in particular was __________.

4. Barbara knew it was time to look for a new job when the tasks she used to enjoy came to seem __________.

5. This word describes writing that is filled with clichés and hackneyed phrases.

6. Jackie was known in her neighborhood as a terrible hostess; the food she cooked was __________ and her conversation was __________.

7. The contracting firm failed to win bids because its written proposals to clients were too __________; they lacked all creativity or excitement.

Words from Gods and Heroes

Lecture 11

Just mentioning the names of characters from Greek and Roman mythology brings to mind vivid images; think of Zeus casting lightning bolts down from the heavens or Apollo driving his sun chariot across the sky. In fact, we're still surrounded by the stories of these characters in books, movies, and even video games. One reason we remain interested in myths is that they help us make sense of the world. But they also, as Joseph Campbell wrote, help us tap into the "rapture of being alive." Myths embody our highest dreams, greatest sorrows, most horrific fears, and most fervently held values. In this lecture, we'll explore some words and phrases derived from myths that live on in English today.

Sisyphean (adjective)

Endlessly laborious and futile.

- The word *Sisyphean* comes from the Greek myth of Sisyphus, the king and reputed founder of Corinth. One day, Sisyphus encountered the river god Asopus, who was searching for his lost daughter, Aegina. Sisyphus said that he would tell Asopus the whereabouts of his daughter but only after the river god gave the city of Corinth a spring. Eventually, Asopus agreed and created a source of water for the city.

- Sisyphus then told Asopus that Zeus had carried off his daughter. In a rage, Asopus followed Zeus and came upon him unawares, without his trademark thunderbolt. Weaponless and fearing the river god's fury, Zeus morphed himself into a rock and changed Aegina into an island, which she remains to this day.

- Zeus, not pleased that a mere mortal had meddled in his affairs, asked his brother Hades to take Sisyphus back to the underworld and punish him. To arrest Sisyphus, Hades brought a pair of

handcuffs forged by Hephaestus, the god of blacksmiths, fire, and volcanoes. But Sisyphus tricked Hades into trying on the handcuffs first, capturing him and preventing him from taking the dead to the underworld.

- For a time, mortals on earth didn't die, but eventually, Hades was freed and Sisyphus was taken to the underworld. However, he managed to trick Hades again and returned to earth, where he lived to a ripe old age.

- After a long and happy life, Sisyphus eventually returned to the underworld yet again, where the gods had devised a particularly torturous punishment for him: He was given the job of pushing a huge boulder up a steep hill; each time he reached the top of the hill, the boulder would slip out of his hands and roll back down. This task gives us the word *Sisyphean*, referring to jobs that are difficult and seemingly endless.

Sword of Damocles (noun phrase)

A constant and imminent peril; an impending disaster.

- The phrase *sword of Damocles* comes to us from a Greek parable. Damocles was a professional flatterer, one of many courtiers of Dionysius the Elder, a 4th-century-B.C.E. tyrant of Syracuse. While pandering to the king, Damocles remarked that Dionysius was truly fortunate to have such wealth, power, and influence. In response, Dionysius offered to switch places with Damocles for a day, and without a second thought, the courtier agreed.
  - At first, the experience was wonderful for Damocles, who sat on the throne, ate sumptuous meals, and was waited on hand and foot. But Damocles soon had a feeling that something was wrong. He turned his gaze upward and saw a sword hanging point down above his head, suspended by a single horsehair. Damocles immediately asked to switch back with Dionysius, saying that he no longer had any desire to be so fortunate.

    - Dionysius had made his point: With great power and authority come great fear and anxiety; rulers live in constant fear because they have what others want. For the ancients, this parable's lesson is that power, wealth, and fame do not lead to a happy life; it is virtue and a simpler life that make one happy.

- Today, the phrase *sword of Damocles* refers to a situation of constant and imminent peril. President John F. Kennedy used the phrase in this sense in a 1961 address to the UN General Assembly: "Every man, woman and child lives under a nuclear sword of Damocles, hanging by the slenderest of threads, capable of being cut at any moment by accident or miscalculation or by madness."

Gordian knot (noun phrase)

An exceedingly complicated and intricate problem or deadlock; an intractable problem.

- The phrase *Gordian knot* comes to us from a myth about the people of Phrygia. During a period of civil unrest, the Phrygians in the city of Telmissus asked an oracle who would become their next ruler. The oracle replied that the next man who entered the city riding an ox cart would become the king.

- That man was Gordius, who entered Telmissus with his wife and his son, Midas. After being proclaimed king, Gordius dedicated his ox cart to Zeus and tied the cart with an incredibly intricate knot around the pin that connected the yoke to the chariot.

- Later, another oracle foretold that whoever was able to undo the Gordian knot would become ruler of all Asia. Not surprisingly, would-be kings came from miles around to try to undo the knot, but all of them failed.

- Many years later, Alexander the Great attempted to untangle the knot. The story has it that Alexander, not being able to find the ends, either sliced through the knot with his sword or reached inside it and removed

the pin around which the knot had been tied. In either case, Alexander took quick and decisive action to solve an intractable problem.

Mercurial (adjective)

1. Liable to sudden and unpredictable change; volatile; erratic.
2. Animated, lively, quick-witted.

- The word *mercurial* is related to Hermes, the Greek god of commerce and trade and the messenger god, who is also identified with the Roman god Mercury. Hermes was the son of Zeus and Maia and was a trickster from the day he was born.
  - Within minutes of his birth, Hermes grew into a small boy and snuck out of his cradle. Outside, he came upon a herd of cows owned by Apollo, god of the sun. Hermes stole the cattle and returned home. He then slaughtered two of the beasts and strung the cow gut across a tortoise shell to fashion a new instrument—the lyre.

  - Apollo tracked Hermes down and hauled him before a council of the gods on Mount Olympus, accusing the boy of the theft and slaughter of his cattle. In his own defense, Hermes explained that the day before, when he had been born, he was too young to know right from wrong. But 24 hours later, he had matured, gained wisdom, and realized the error of his ways.

  - Hermes asked for forgiveness and promised that he would return the rest of the cattle; regarding the two cows he had killed, Hermes said that he would cut them up into 12 equal portions to sacrifice to the 12 Olympian gods. When Apollo pointed out that there were only 11 Olympian gods, Hermes declared that he himself was the 12th!

  - A bit later, Apollo demanded to have Hermes's tortoiseshell lyre. Hermes said that he would give Apollo the lyre if he could keep the cows that he had stolen. This was the first bargain

ever struck and assured Hermes's place as not only the god of tricksters but also the god of commerce.

- Hermes is often pictured wearing a winged hat and winged sandals, which enable him to fly as fast as a bird—perfect for the messenger of the gods. Hermes was quick and lively and, as we said, was associated with the Roman god Mercury. From this god's name, we get the adjective *mercurial*, which means prone to sudden and unpredictable change, as well as animated, lively, and quick-witted. Mercury/Hermes was all of these things.

Saturnalia (noun)

A celebration marked by unrestrained revelry and, often, promiscuity and excessive drinking.

- *Saturnalia* comes to us from the Roman god of agriculture, Saturn. In ancient Rome, a week-long festival, the Saturnalia, was held in December to honor Saturn. The festival was marked by gift giving, gambling, and role reversals, in which slaves were served by their masters.

Saturnine (adjective)

Melancholy, sluggish, gloomy.

- The god Saturn also gives us *saturnine*, meaning "morose and sullen." This meaning comes from the fact that ancient and medieval astrologers believed that those born under the planet Saturn would have a gloomy temperament.

Promethean (adjective)

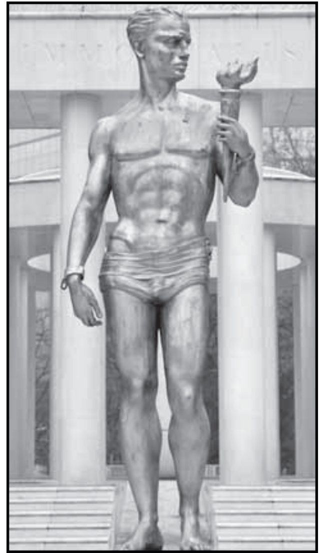
Daringly original or creative; boldly inventive.

- *Promethean* comes from the name of the Greek Titan Prometheus. After the defeat of the other Titans by the Greek gods, Zeus

gave to Prometheus and his brother, Epimetheus, the job of repopulating the earth.

- Zeus also gave the brothers a basket that contained many gifts they could bestow upon their creations. Prometheus and Epimetheus began to shape river clay into humans and animals, with Prometheus creating the humans and Epimetheus, the animals.

- Prometheus, whose name means "forethought," carefully shaped humans in the image of the gods, but Epimetheus, whose name means "afterthought," rushed through the job, creating the animals quickly.



© fotonehru/iStock/Thinkstock.

Like Prometheus, those who are described as Promethean take bold, innovative action to break through boundaries in their fields of endeavor.

- When Prometheus was finished, he looked in the basket of gifts and found that his brother had taken nearly all of the good ones, giving the animals great advantages over humans! Animals could run faster, see better, and had a keener sense of smell than humans. And when the weather became cold, animals had coats of fur or feathers to keep them warm.

- Seeing that humans had literally been left out in the cold, Prometheus asked Zeus if he could take some of the sacred fire from Mount Olympus for humans. Zeus, afraid of how powerful humans might become with fire, refused. But Prometheus snuck onto Mount Olympus, stole an ember from the forge of Hephaestus, and smuggled it back to earth. Now, humans had warmth on cold evenings, light to see by at night, protection against animals and enemies, and the ability to forge tools.

- When Zeus found out about the stolen fire, he was furious. Later, he also discovered that Prometheus had taught humans how to trick the gods by hiding the choicest portions of their sacrifices. Thus, Zeus chained Prometheus to the top of the Caucasus Mountains with a chain of unbreakable iron links. Every day, a vulture would swoop down and eat Prometheus's liver, but because Prometheus was immortal, every night, his liver grew back. The next day, the vulture would return to pick at Prometheus's liver again.

- From this story, we get the word *Promethean*, an adjective that describes Prometheus, who was "daringly original, boldly inventive." Someone who is Promethean is an innovator; an original, clever, and imaginative thinker and doer; courageously and defiantly original.

Review Questions

1. The parade of criminals who passed in front of her bench every day left the judge with a __________ outlook on humanity.

2. Convincing the accounting department to try a new approach to payroll distribution proved to be a __________ task.

3. What two phrases originating in Greek mythology might be appropriate in discussing the threat of terrorism in the 21st century?

4. The students lived in fear that the __________ professor would change his mind about grading their exams on a curve.

5. The __________ efforts of early-20th-century scientists dramatically changed our understanding of the physical world.

6. For many people, Halloween has become an occasion to throw a party that might justly be classified as a __________.

Humble Words and Prideful Words

Lecture 12

Like many words, *pride* has various connotations, depending on how it's used. You might be justly proud of your accomplishments, in which case, *pride* would have a positive connotation. However, excessive pride can lead to arrogance and haughtiness—words with distinctly negative connotations. In this lecture, we'll examine some target words related to overbearing pride and prideful behavior—words you can use to describe all the pompous, pretentious jerks; conceited, swollen-headed windbags; presumptuous, preening peacocks; egotistical, puffed-up know-it-alls; brash, self-aggrandizing grandstanders; vainglorious showoffs; and other self-important braggarts, blusterers, boasters, braggadocios, big talkers, and blowhards in your life.

Supercilious (adjective)

Feeling or showing haughty disdain; displaying arrogant pride, even scorn.

- *Supercilious* often describes people or facial expressions. Unfortunately, we've all encountered supercilious people—those who think that they're better than everyone else. Consider the word in context: "When we told the supercilious real estate agent our price range for a house, he rolled his eyes and quickly ended our meeting."

- The *super*- in *supercilious* is a Latin prefix meaning "above or beyond," as in such words as *supervisor*, *superior*, and *superabundance*. And *cilium* actually means "eyelash." Because your eyebrows are "above" your eyelashes on your face, an eyebrow is a supercilium. You can connect this word to *supercilious* by visualizing arrogant people who raise their eyebrows in disdain.

- Wonderfully vivid and descriptive synonyms and related words for *supercilious* are legion in English, including *arrogant*, *uppity*, *haughty*, *pompous*, *priggish*, *pretentious*, *prideful*, *patronizing*,

disdainful, *condescending*, *swaggering*, *lofty*, *lordly*, *high and mighty*, *highfalutin*, *sniffy*, *snooty*, and *snotty*.

Bumptious (adjective)

Pushy; offensively or loudly self-assertive; cocky.

- *Bumptious* describes a different type of arrogance than *supercilious*. With *bumptious*, the focus isn't on scornful disdain but on the loud and pushy aspects of arrogance. Think of the whippersnapper who drives on the shoulder of the road to get ahead of traffic or the pushy colleague at work who dominates every conversation. Bumptious people are overly confident in a loud, rude, and annoying way.

- *The American Heritage Dictionary* relates that *bumptious* is probably a combination of *bump* and *pretentious*. To remember *bumptious*, think of an unruly, troublesome person who is so arrogant and pushy that he or she bumps you out of the way to cut in line.

Hubris (noun)

Excessive pride or self-confidence; arrogance.

- The Greek hero Odysseus was guilty of hubris when he revealed his true name to the Cyclops Polyphemus after he had tricked and blinded the giant. For his hubris, Odysseus was punished by Poseidon, father of Polyphemus and god of the sea, who delayed the hero's return home for 10 years.

© Mariusika11/iStock/Thinkstock.

In John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, it was Satain's pride—his hubris—that caused his downfall.

- As this story indicates, *hubris* comes from Greek, where it originally meant being "presumptuous toward the gods."

Bombast (noun)

Pretentious, pompous, grandiloquent speech or writing.

- In the 16th century, *bombast* referred to cotton padding and stuffing—insubstantial material used to fill empty cushions or pillows. This original meaning has shifted to words that are used to fill empty speeches or writing to make up for a lack of substance. This word is a perfect example of how many words in our language shift from an original specific, literal meaning to a more general, figurative meaning.

- We often see the adjective form of *bombast*, *bombastic*, used alongside the collocates *prose*, *speech*, and *writing*, as in such phrases as *a politician's bombastic speech* or *the author's bombastic prose*.

- Synonyms for *bombastic* include *turgid*, *orotund*, *verbose*, *prolix*, *florid*, *flowery*, and *pretentious*.
    - *Turgid* comes from a Latin word meaning "to swell" and can refer to "swollen," overblown, inflated language or to physically swollen things, such as rivers.

    - *Orotund* comes from the Latin phrase *ore rotundo*, meaning "with rounded mouth," and somewhat paradoxically, has either a positive or a negative connotation, depending on how it's used. *Orotund* can be positive when referring to a resonant, booming voice and negative when referring to bombastic speech or writing.

    - Use *verbose* when you want to emphasize that the speech uses more words than needed. Another synonym for overly wordy language is *prolix*.

- Use *flowery* when you want to describe language that includes overly ornate images and expressions.

- Use *pretentious* when you want to emphasize language that is intentionally inflated to impress.

Bloviate (verb)

To talk pompously; to talk at great length in a pompous and boastful manner.

- *Bloviate* is an Americanism that sounds like what it means. It is derived from *blow*, which brings to mind a blowhard who blows hot air.

- *Bloviate* has an interesting history, waxing and waning in usage over time. According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, its first known usage was in the late 1800s, but it was already fading by the turn of the century. However, in the 1920s, during the presidency of Warren G. Harding, *bloviate* experienced a comeback in reference to political speech. Harding himself was known for his flowery, overblow prose. The word faded again but staged another comeback during the 2000 election and is used today by the press to characterize the behavior of many politicians.

Sycophant (noun)

A servile, self-seeking flatterer.

- Humility (from Latin *humilis*, "lowly, humble") is a trait we admire, but we've all also encountered people who are falsely modest or who praise others insincerely to get something they want. Such "suck-ups" are sycophants.

- English includes some wonderfully vivid synonyms for sycophants, including *grovelers*, *backscratchers*, *bootlickers*, *toadies*, and *lickspittles*.

Obsequious (adjective)

Servile and fawning; overly deferential.

- Obsequious people show excessive deference to gain favor. They tend to be too much like servants, and their insincere flattering is meant to score points with those in power.

- *Obsequious* contains the Latin root usually spelled *sequ* or *sec* and meaning "follow"; in other words, obsequious people follow others to gain their favor. This fertile root also gives us *sequence*, *non sequitur*, *sequel*, *consecutive*, *persecute*, *second*, *sect*, *consequence*, and *subsequent*.

Wheedle (verb)

To attempt to persuade with beguiling flattery and smooth talking.

- *Wheedle* is an underused word, but it packs an expressive punch, as in the following context sentence: "The teenage girl wheedled her father into letting her drive his Porsche 911 with a few crocodile tears, a sob story, and the seemingly sincere assurance that he was 'the best dad in the world.'"

- *Wheedle* brings to mind the behavior of the snake-oil salesmen, charlatans, hucksters, and mountebanks we discussed in an earlier lecture. Common synonyms for *wheedle* include *cajole* and *coax*.

Blandishment (noun)

Flattery that is designed to persuade a listener to do something.

Unctuous (adjective)

Characterized by affected, exaggerated, or insincere earnestness.

- *Unctuous* comes from the Latin *unctus*, meaning "anointed with oil." This etymology is a perfect reminder for the oily, slick, and smooth-talking behavior of unctuous people. You might link *unctuous* with a description of an unctuous character written by Alan J. Lerner for the musical *My Fair Lady*: "oozing charm from every pore, he oiled his way across the floor."

- A wonderful synonym for *unctuous* that's a little shorter and more down to earth is *smarmy*, as in "The smarmy aide thought that his constant blandishments would butter up the congressman and eventually lead to an appointment."

Review Questions

1. What words apply to self-serving flatterers and the type of conversation they engage in to advance their own interests?

2. Although Farhad praised his supervisor, Amy, for her generosity and ability to recognize talent, she refused to be taken in by his ___________ and didn't give him a raise.

3. We walked out of the car dealership after just five minutes with the ___________ salesman.

4. Despite the efforts of an image consultant and an expert in public speaking, the politician was unable to suppress his tendency to ___________.

5. The ___________ behavior of some millennials has earned the generation as a whole a reputation for arrogance.

6. This personal flaw was the downfall of Othello.

7. Parents must learn to ignore the twin tactics of whining and ___________ from their children.

8. The curmudgeon's frequent letters to the editor of the local newspaper were characterized by __________ rather than substance.

9. The __________ attitude of the saleswoman changed dramatically when Jim flashed a wallet full of credit cards.

High-Frequency Greek and Latin Roots

Lecture 13

In her excellent book *The Greek and Latin Roots of English*, Tamara Green tells of a popular rhyme recited by weary Latin students: "Latin is a dead language, / As you can plainly see. / It killed off all the Romans, / And now it's killing me." Although this little poem makes us smile, it also raises an important question: If no one speaks Latin today, why bother studying it? As we've seen, Latin and ancient Greek are very much alive in English and many other languages, and the point of studying Greek and Latin affixes and roots is to improve our English. In this lecture, then, we'll explore some high-frequency Latin and Greek affixes and roots.

A Pleasant Prefix: *eu-*

- The prefix *eu-* comes from Greek and means "good, well, or pleasant." For example, the word *eulogy* combines the prefix *eu-* with the Greek noun *logos*, meaning "word." Thus, if you offer a eulogy at a funeral, you are speaking well of the deceased.

- Other English words that use the *eu-* prefix include *euphemism*, which is the use of a more pleasant word in place of a word that seems overly blunt or harsh, and *euphonious*, which refers to a pleasant sound.

- Two *eu-* words that spark debate are *eugenics* and *euthanasia*. In Greek, *eugenics* literally means "good birth." This word refers to the idea that the human race can be improved through selective breeding. *Euthanasia* incorporates the prefix *eu-* with the Greek noun *thanatos*, meaning "death." Thus, *euthanasia* literally means "a good or pleasant death," and of course, the word is used to refer to mercy killing.

High-Frequency Prefixes: *dis-* and *in-*

- The Latin prefix *dis-* can mean "not," as well as "opposite or apart, away." To remember this prefix, keep in mind two key words: *disagree* ("not to agree") and *discard* ("to throw away").

- The Latin prefix *in*- also means “not or without,” as in *incorrect*. This relatively simply prefix can help you decode such words as *ineluctable* (“not capable of being avoided”) and *ineffable* (“not capable of being described in words”).

Dishabille (noun)

A state of being dressed in a very casual or even careless, disheveled, and disorderly style.

- We find the *dis*- prefix in *dishabille*, a word borrowed from the French. A quick look into the etymology of this word lets us know that the second part, *habille*, comes from the French *habiller*, meaning “to dress.” Literally, *dishabille* would mean “not dressed,” and in fact, the original French word, *d*és*habill*é, meant “not fully dressed” or scantily clothed.”

- For our current English meaning of “disheveled” or “casually or carelessly attired,” let’s make a different connection: *Habille* is also

© Aneese/iStock/Thinkstock.

Once you turn on your morphological radar, you’ll begin to see Latin and Greek roots and prefixes everywhere!

related to the noun *habit*, as in the clothing worn by religious and clerical orders. In your vocabulary notebook, highlight the DIS part of the word, meaning "not," and the HABI in *habille* and relate it to *habit*, as in: "A nun who is often in dishabille is not in the habit of wearing her habit properly."

- The high-utility prefix *dis*- gives you a powerful hook to help you remember that a large part of the meaning of *dishabille* is "not." Knowledge of relatively frequent prefixes, such as *dis*-, can be a great help in learning relatively infrequent, sophisticated vocabulary words.

- Think of the prefixes and roots you're learning in this course as the tools to turn on your morphological radar—your Latin and Greek early warning detection system. Knowing these prefixes and roots will help you identify Latin and Greek word parts, and that can help you sort out and store the meanings of unfamiliar words.

High-Utility Prefixes: *dys*-, *pre*-, and *post*-

- Like the Latin *dis*- prefix, the Greek *dys*- carries a negative connotation, but the Greek prefix means "bad, abnormal, or difficult" in such words as *dysfunctional*, *dysentery*, *dystopia*, and *dyslexia*.

- The prefix *pre*- is from the Latin preposition *prae*, which means "before" in such words as *preview*, *premature*, and even *prefix*.

- The prefix *post*- is from the Latin preposition *post*, which means "after" in such words as *postmortem* and *postgame*.

Prescient (adjective)

Perceiving the significance of events before they happen.

- You may not hear the *pre*- prefix in *prescient* because the sound has changed, but note that the spelling has not, which reminds us of the spelling-meaning connection.

- Here's *prescient* in context: "The prescient economist predicted the stock market collapse well before anyone else."

A Handy Root: *man*

- The root *man* comes from the Latin noun *manus*, meaning "hand." It's found in such words as *manufacture*, *manual*, *manipulate*, *manacle*, *manuscript*, and *manicure*.

- Interestingly, this root is also found in the word *manure*. What does the excrement of animals, often used as a fertilizer, have to do with hands?
    - *Manure* as a verb came into English from an Old French word in approximately 1400, when it meant "to cultivate the land." Of course, medieval farmers cultivated their lands with their hands.

    - A significant part of working the earth was fertilizing it, which led to the current noun *manure*, meaning "dung spread as fertilizer."

Manumit (verb)

To release from slavery or servitude.

- *Manumit* comes from two Latin roots: *man* ("hand") and *mit*, from the Latin verb *mitto*, meaning "send, let go, release." Think of the "hand" here in the sense of the power of the master who releases a slave. You may also encounter the noun form of this verb, *manumission*, which refers to the act of setting someone free.

A Shady Root: *umbr*

- The root *umbr* is found in the word *umbrella*, the original purpose of which was to protect one from the sun, not the rain. In terms of its etymology, *umbrella* actually means "little shadow" and comes to English through Italian from the Latin noun *umbra*, meaning "shade, shadow." Think of the ancient Romans, in their

sunny Mediterranean climate, carrying around umbrellas to protect themselves from the sun by providing a “little shadow” for themselves.

- Other words you may know that are derived from *umbr* include *umbra* (a region of complete shadow resulting from a total obstruction of light), *penumbra* (the partial shadow outside of a complete shadow), *sombrero*, and *somber*.

- The word *umbrage* is also related to this root. As noted in John Ayto’s *Dictionary of Word Origins*, “The expression *take umbrage*, ‘take offense,’ arises from a metaphorical extension of ‘shadow’ to ‘suspicion.’” In other words, suspicious statements and people are shady, and when someone makes a statement that we suspect is insulting, we take umbrage.

Adumbrate (verb)

1. To give a sketchy outline of; to suggest, disclose, or outline partially.
2. To foreshadow vaguely; to intimate.

- Here’s an example of the first sense of *adumbrate* in context: “When quizzed by the English teacher, the student was able to briefly adumbrate the major themes in the novel.”

- The second sense appears in this context sentence: “The first scene in the play, where she notices the new buds on the trees, adumbrates her spiritual rebirth in the second scene.”

A Root with Traction: *tract*

- The root *tract* comes from the Latin verb *traho*, which means “to drag, pull, draw, or haul.” It can be found in such words as *tractor*, *traction*, *extract*, *retract*, *distract*, *attract*, and *intractable* (“not able to be pulled”).

A Hot Root: *therm*(*o*)

- This root has a history going back to 480 B.C.E. At that time, Xerxes the Great, ruler of the Persian Empire, was invading Greece with his massive army, which according to modern estimates may have numbered approximately 100,000 men. In response, a number of Greek city-states decided to put their rivalries aside and form an alliance to repel the invading Persians.

- To face the enormous Persian army, the Greeks made a strategically astute decision. They planned to defend the narrow coastal pass of Thermopylae, which means the "Hot Gates," a reference to the hot sulfur springs there.
    - Of all the Greeks, the Spartans were known as the fiercest and most well-trained warriors. Thus, it was no surprise that King Leonidas and his Spartans ended up leading the Greek allied army against the Persians.

    - Leonidas chose 300 of his best Spartan soldiers to make the stand at Thermopylae. These 300 warriors were joined by approximately 6,000 soldiers from the other Greek cities.

- Before the Battle of Thermopylae began, Xerxes attempted to negotiate with the Spartans, promising them their freedom and better land if they submitted. When Leonidas refused these terms, Xerxes demanded of the Greeks, "Hand over your arms." Leonidas's famously terse reply has echoed down the ages: "Come and take them."

- The Persians attacked, and although they greatly outnumbered the Greeks, they couldn't take advantage of their overwhelming numbers because of the narrow pass. In addition, the longer spears of the Spartans were particularly deadly in this narrow space. Wave after wave of attacking Persians were repulsed as the Spartans rotated their troops, some holding the front line while others rested.

- Eventually, however, the tide turned. Ephialtes, a Greek traitor who hoped to be rewarded by the Persians, showed the Persians another

path winding through the mountains that enabled the Persians to outflank the Greek army. When Leonidas realized his dire situation, he decided to stay and fight to the death with his 300 Spartans. This allowed the rest of the Greek army to retreat in safety and live to fight another day.

- The Spartans fought to the last. When their weapons broke, they fought with their hands and their teeth. Eventually, they were overrun, but their courage set an example for the rest of Greece.

- This courageous account from history leads us to the Greek root *therm*(*o*), found in the word *Thermopylae*, meaning "heat or temperature." This root is found in such words as *thermal*, *thermometer*, *hypothermia*, *hyperthermia*, *thermodynamics*, and *geothermal*.

Review Questions

1. How is the word *adumbrate* related to the root *umbr*?

2. What word related to *manumit* also contains the *man* root?

3. This word, meaning "casually or carelessly dressed," contains the Latin prefix *dis*-, meaning "not."

4. The Latin prefix *pre*- is slightly hidden in this word, which means "having foresight."

Words Relating to Belief and Trust

Lecture 14

The great 19th-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once said, "I'm not upset that you lied to me, I'm upset that from now on I can't believe you." Nietzsche's quote shows just how closely trust and belief—the two themes of this lecture—are tied together. English has a number of precise and powerful words to describe different facets of trust and belief. As we explore vocabulary centering on these themes, we will also answer these questions: What's an apostate, and is it related to an apostle? And what's the difference among *equivocal*, *ambiguous*, and *ambivalent*?

Dogmatic (adjective)

Characterized by an authoritative, arrogant assertion of unproven ideas.

- *Dogmatic* can describe someone who adheres to one way and only one way—someone who is narrow-minded rather than open-minded. The word might be used in context as follows: "The CEO's dogmatic adherence to her way of doing business—because that's the way she had always worked—led the company down the path to eventual bankruptcy."

- Synonyms and related words for *dogmatic* include *authoritarian*, *imperious*, and *doctrinaire*. Use *imperious* if you want to emphasize someone's haughty, overbearing manner. Use *doctrinaire* if you want to emphasize stubborn adherence to a doctrine or theory even if it's not practical. More informal terms for *dogmatic* include *pushy*, *opinionated*, *one-sided*, and *narrow-minded*.

- The noun form of *dogmatic* is *dogma*, which means "doctrines and beliefs relating to morality and faith." The original Greek word *dogma* meant an "opinion, tenet" or, literally, "that which one thinks is true." Thus, the original meaning of *dogma*—"an opinion,

what one thinks is true"—is closer to what *dogmatic* means today: "arrogantly opinionated."

Pontificate (verb)

> To speak or express opinions in a pompous or dogmatic way.

- Someone who pontificates speaks in a patronizing and supercilious manner, especially at some length. For example, consider the word in context: "My high-and-mighty roommate never misses a chance to pontificate, regardless of whether she knows anything about the topic."

- Related to *pontificate* is the word *pontiff*, which can refer to a high priest, a bishop, or the pope. *Pontificate* can also mean to perform the duties of a pontiff.

Apostate (noun)

> Someone who abandons his or her religion, political beliefs, principles, or cause.

- *Apostate* is the term used for a believer in one religion or cause who makes a complete turnaround from his or her beliefs, such as a liberal Democrat who becomes a conservative Republican. The word comes from the Greek prefix *apo*-, meaning "away from," and the Greek verb *stenai*, meaning "to stand." In other words, an apostate "stands away from" his or her beliefs.

- Synonyms and related words for *apostate* include *backslider*, *defector*, *deserter*, *renegade*, *heretic*, and *turncoat*.

- Part of *apostate* is related to the word *apostle*. According to John Ayto's *Dictionary of Word Origins*, *apostle* was borrowed from Greek into Latin and then into Old English, and it meant "messenger." *Apostle* and *apostate* both share the Greek prefix *apo*-, meaning "away from." However, the second part of *apostle* came

from the Greek verb *stellein*, meaning "to send." Thus, an apostle is a messenger "sent away" to spread the word, whereas an apostate "stands away" from his or her former beliefs.

Agitprop (noun)

Political propaganda delivered through art, music, drama, or literature.

- *Agitprop* is an example of a *portmanteau word*, that is, a word created by combining two or more parts of other words, in this case, *agitation* and *propaganda*. *Agitprop* was a shortened form of the name of a Communist Party committee in the former Soviet Union, the Department of Agitation and Propaganda. This department's mission was to spread communist beliefs, principles, and ideals throughout the world. *Agitprop theater* was a term used to describe the leftist plays that originated in Europe in the 1920s and later spread to the United States.

© Jultud/iStock/Thinkstock.

***Smog* is a portmanteau word formed by the combination of *smoke* and *fog*.**

- In English, *agitprop* usually carries a negative connotation and is used generally to describe any work, particularly in an artistic form, that attempts to indoctrinate people for political purposes. For example: "Although she acknowledged that the movie was left-wing agitprop, the critic also noted, somewhat surprisingly, that it had a compelling plot and characters that the audience actually cared about."

- *Agitprop* can also be used as an adjective, as in "The play's agitprop message was so blatant that audience members felt as if they had been repeatedly smacked over the head with a political pamphlet."

Trusty Roots: *fid* and *cred*

- The root *fid* is from the Latin noun *fides*, meaning "trust, faith." It appears in a large number of English words, including *fidelity*, *confident*, *confidence*, *infidelity*, *infidel*, *affidavit* (a statement written under oath and, therefore, supposedly trustworthy), *bona fide*, and *diffident*.

- The root *cred* is from the Latin verb *credo*, meaning "believe." This root also gives us a large number of words, including *incredible*, *credit*, *credentials*, *accredited*, *credible*, *credulous* (believing too easily; gullible), and *incredulous* (not inclined to believe, skeptical).

Perfidious (adjective)

Treacherous, disloyal, and deceitful.

- *Perfidious* is used to describe people who are underhanded, dishonest, or disloyal, as in "The perfidious soldier switched sides during the war, revealing his commanding general's strategy to the enemy."

- The noun form of *perfidious* is *perfidy*, meaning "treachery." *Perfidious* comes from the Latin prefix *per-*, meaning "through" in such words as *perspiration* ("breathing through the skin"), and the Latin root *fid*, meaning "faith." Thus, *perfidious* literally means

“through or beyond the limits of faith.” A trusted friend who stabs you in the back goes beyond the limits of your faith.

Equivocal (adjective)

Open to two or more interpretations, often with an intent to mislead or to be purposely vague.

- Evidence and answers are often described as equivocal, as in: “The criminal’s equivocal answers to the police officer’s direct questions were an obvious ploy to avoid arrest.”

- *Equivocate* is the verb form of *equivocal* and means to use unclear language, particularly with the intent to deceive. It’s the perfect word to use with backtrackers, back peddlers, and anyone who fudges, hedges, shillyshallies, or engages in double-talk. *Unequivocal* is an antonym for *equivocal*, meaning “not equivocal, leaving no doubt, clear, or unambiguous.”

- The first part of *equivocal* comes from the Latin root *equ*, meaning “equal” and found in such words as *equality*, *equator*, *equilibrium*, and *equidistant*. The second part of *equivocal* comes from the Latin root *voc*, meaning “call” and found in such words as *vocal*, *vociferous*, and *revoke*. To remember this word, highlight the *equ* and *voc* roots in your vocabulary notebook, noting that *equivocal* describes something, such as an answer, that gives “equal voice, equal significance” to all things—that’s why it’s vague or deceptive.

- *Equivocal* is sometimes confused with *ambiguous* and *ambivalent*.
    - The Latin prefix *ambi*- in *ambiguous* means “both.” Thus, something that’s ambiguous can have “both” possible meanings; it’s not clear which one. Note that *ambiguous* means vague and lacking clarity, while *equivocal* describes something that is purposely ambiguous or vague, with the intent of misleading. It’s the intent to mislead that often differentiates between the two words.

- ○ *Ambivalent* means having mixed feelings and difficulty choosing. This word also contains the prefix *ambi*-, meaning "both." If you're ambivalent about going to a movie, part of you wants to stay and part of you wants to go; you feel both ways.

Dissemble (verb)

To disguise or conceal behind a false appearance.

- *Dissemble* is related to the English word *resemble* and comes from the Latin *simulo,* meaning "pretend, assume, simulate."

- To remember this word, highlight the *semble* part of *dissemble* in your vocabulary notebook and relate it to *resemble*. Someone who dissembles tries to resemble someone else. One world-class dissembler was Frank Abagnale, a real-life imposter whose life story is told in the movie *Catch Me If You Can*.

Review Questions

1. Charlie __________ at great length on the subject of modern politics, although he seems to know little about it.

2. Caught in the act of skipping school, Steve __________, telling his mother that classes had been canceled because of an outbreak of food poisoning in the cafeteria.

3. Keisha's __________ attacks on Ben's character served only to make her seem deceitful and disloyal.

4. This is a portmanteau word used to refer to a form of political propaganda conveyed through art.

5. The mayor's __________ answers at the press conference caused reporters to dig deeper into the allegations of corruption in his administration.

6. The professor's __________ approach to teaching left little room for open discussion in his class.

7. Anyone who strayed from the "party line" in the terrorist cell was labeled an __________ and marked for death.

Words for the Way We Talk
Lecture 15

The baseball player Yogi Berra was known for his humorous sayings, including "I never said most of the things I said." At one time or another, probably all of us, like Yogi, would love to take back something we've said. This lecture and the next focus on the theme of speaking. We may speak to praise someone, to plead a case, to lament a sorrow, or to denounce a wrong. English has powerful vocabulary words to describe each of these types of speech, and we will explore many of them in these lectures. This lecture focuses on negative speech, while the next one looks at positive speech and words relating to nonsense speech, including jibber-jabber, hogwash, and baloney.

Laconic (adjective)

Using few words, terse, brief, succinct, taciturn, concise.

- The word *laconic* brings to mind the characters played by Clint Eastwood in the spaghetti westerns of the 1960s. In such films as *A Fistful of Dollars* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, Eastwood's gunslinger said little, preferring to let his six-shooter do most of the talking.

- The English word *laconic* comes from Laconia, a region in ancient Greece whose capital was Sparta. In contrast to their rivals, the Athenians, who prided themselves on being great orators, the Spartans prided themselves on the exact opposite, the brevity of their speech. At one point in history, King Philip of Macedon threatened the Spartans with takeover, saying, "If I enter Laconia, I will raze Sparta to the ground." The Spartans' laconic reply was "If …."

Pithy (adjective)

Language that is short and terse but meaningful.

- Both *pithy* and *laconic* refer to language that is brief and succinct, but *pithy* implies the added meaning of language that is meaningful and powerful. For example: "In direct contrast to the bombastic, long-winded arguments of the prosecuting attorney, the defense attorney's pithy arguments won the case."

- *Pithy* comes from *pith*, which is the soft, spongy center of the stem of most flowering plants—in other words, the essential part of a plant. *Pith* can also be used in a figurative sense to refer to the essential or central part of anything, such as an argument. The pith of something is its heart or essence, its substance. For example: "The losing debate team seemed to dance around the central issues, while the winning team's arguments struck right at the pith of the matter." *Pith*, in turn, is related to *pit*, as in a peach pit.

Obloquy (noun)

1. Harshly critical speech or verbal abuse.
2. The disgrace that results from such abuse.

- *Obloquy* shares the Latin root *loq* with a number of other words in English related to speech and speaking, such as *ventriloquist*, *soliloquy*, and *loquacious*. It refers to harshly critical speech, in particular, criticism made by the public or a group of people toward an individual. For example: "Having cast an unpopular deciding vote, the congressman was subjected to obloquy from nearly all the members of the opposition party."

- *Obloquy* is a combination of the Latin prefix *ob*- and the root *loq*. The prefix *ob*- has a number of different meanings, but in *obloquy*, it means "against, in opposition to." Thus, *obloquy* is "speech made against others."

Foment (verb)

To stir up, incite, rouse, provoke, inflame, encourage, or instigate.

- *Foment* is often used alongside its collocates *riot*, *insurrection*, and *rebellion*, as in, "A few hardcore guerillas attempted to foment a widespread insurrection against the brutal dictatorship."

- Associating the *fom* in *foment* with the word *foam* may help you remember that *foment* means "to stir or whip up."

Fulminate (verb)

1. To issue a thunderous verbal attack; to vehemently denounce. **2.** To explode with sudden violence; to detonate.

- *Fulminate* comes from the Latin word *fulmen*, meaning "a lightning flash." This etymology captures the second, more literal definition of the word.

- Synonyms for *fulminate* include *rail against*, *upbraid*, *denounce*, *lambaste*, *berate*, *castigate*, and *excoriate*.

Philippic (noun)

A bitter verbal attack; a rant filled with harsh, cruel language.

- *Philippic* has a memorable etymology. The original philippics were a series of speeches by the great Athenian orator Demosthenes. In these speeches, Demosthenes denounced King Philip of Macedon and warned his fellow Athenians of Philip's political ambitions. We now use *philippic* to refer to any bitter denunciation or verbal attack. In your vocabulary notebook, highlight the *philip* in *philippic* to remember this etymology: Demosthenes's verbal attacks against King Philip.

© Mike Watson Images/moodboard/Thinkstock.

An angry coach is likely to deliver a postgame philippic to the press.

- Synonyms for *philippic* include *invective*, *vituperation*, *diatribe*, *rant*, *tirade*, *harangue*, and *broadside*.
    - *Invective* is a noun that refers to a vehement or violent denunciation; a railing accusation, usually bitter and sarcastic, as in "The prisoner hurled a stream of invectives at the judge, jury, and prosecutors as he was led away in chains."

    - *Vituperation* is a synonym for *invective* that refers to a violent denunciation or verbal abuse or castigation. It's often heard in its adjective form, *vituperative*.

    - A diatribe is a bitter, sharply abusive denunciation, attack, or criticism. For example: "The increasingly bitter diatribes against the horrific boss led to his resignation."

    - A tirade is a long, vehement speech or bitter denunciation. For example: "After finding cigarette butts and ash in the customers' food, the health inspector launched into a 20-minute tirade against smoking in the restaurant's kitchen."

- ○ A harangue can be a noun that means a scolding or a long and intense verbal attack. *Harangue* can also be used as a verb meaning to deliver such a verbal attack, as in "His mother constantly harangues him about his messy room."

Vilify (verb)

To attack someone's reputation with strong or abusive criticism; to malign.

- *Vilify* means to say terrible things about a person, whether such statements are true or not. Consider this context sentence: "Although she was initially vilified in the media for her controversial findings, the scientist's reputation was restored by other researchers who confirmed her hypothesis."

- The first three letters in *vilify*, *vil*, give us a spelling-meaning connection with the word *vile*. When you vilify someone, you say vile things about that person.

- Synonyms and related words for *vilify* are numerous, including *backbite*, *malign*, *slander*, *slur*, *libel*, *defame*, *disparage*, *denigrate*, *knock down*, *put down*, *tear down*, *slam*, *pan*, *besmirch*, *smear*, and *sully*.

Calumny (noun)

A false accusation maliciously intended to destroy someone's reputation.

- *Calumny* is a good word for the slanderous lies and false accusations you might use to vilify someone. Consider, for example, this context sentence: "Instead of basing his attacks on the president's actual policies, the candidate resorted to calumny to try to smear the chief executive's reputation."

- The verb form of *calumny* is *calumniate*, which means "to utter maliciously false statements."

Bowdlerize (verb)

To change a text by removing or modifying parts that could offend people.

- *Bowdlerize* is an *eponym*, that is, a word derived from someone's name. It came from an English physician named Thomas Bowdler, who, in the early 19th century, decided that Shakespeare's plays were too risqué to be appropriate for the public. Bowdler took it upon himself to remove all material from Shakespeare's plays that he deemed offensive, objectionable, or immoral. He then published an expurgated version of Shakespeare titled *The Family Shakespeare* in 1818.

- According to *The Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories*, Bowdler described his censored version of Shakespeare in this way: "Those words and expressions are omitted which cannot with propriety be read aloud in a family." He further stated that he wanted to make the plays appropriate for "the perusal of our virtuous females." After cleaning up Shakespeare, Bowdler continued his linguistic purification of literature, starting in on Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

- The word *bowdlerize* took off quickly as Bowdler's name was associated with the purging of literary works. By 1836, only a few years after Bowdler's death, *bowdlerize* was already being used as a verb to describe removing or modifying passages in text considered vulgar or offensive.

Review Questions

1. This word can be traced back to the Athenian orator Demosthenes, who denounced King Philip of Macedon for his political ambitions.

2. Despite the fact that Senator Johnson was innocent, the __________ spread by her opponent did its job; the senator was __________ in the news media.

3. In turn, the leader of Johnson's party __________ against what he deemed as the media's tendency to report first and investigate later.

4. The storm of __________ that followed the incident took its toll on Senator Johnson's health.

5. This word is an eponym that means to purge a text of material that might be deemed offensive.

6. Susan's __________ speech charmed her audience.

7. The students' attempt to __________ a protest fizzled out when the university president agreed to meet with student body representatives and discuss their concerns.

8. Gerald's __________ style of speech attracted women who valued a touch of mystery and machismo in their relationships.

Words for Praise, Criticism, and Nonsense

Lecture 16

In the last lecture, we explored words relating to negative speech, such as *obloquy*, *fulminate*, and *philippic*. In this lecture, we'll wrap up our discussion of negative speech words, then move on to some words that deal with positive speech. Finally, we'll finish with words that describe speech that's just plain nonsense. Along the way, we'll answer the following questions: Does *maunder* have anything to do with *meander*, meaning "to wander around aimlessly"? Is a formal speech of praise best characterized as a panegyric or a jeremiad? Finally, what is claptrap?

Maunder (verb)

To talk aimlessly and incoherently.

- Someone who maunders is the exact opposite of someone who is pithy, one of our target words from the previous lecture. *Maunder* means to talk on and on without meaning; in contrast, *pithy* refers to language that is brief and full of meaning.

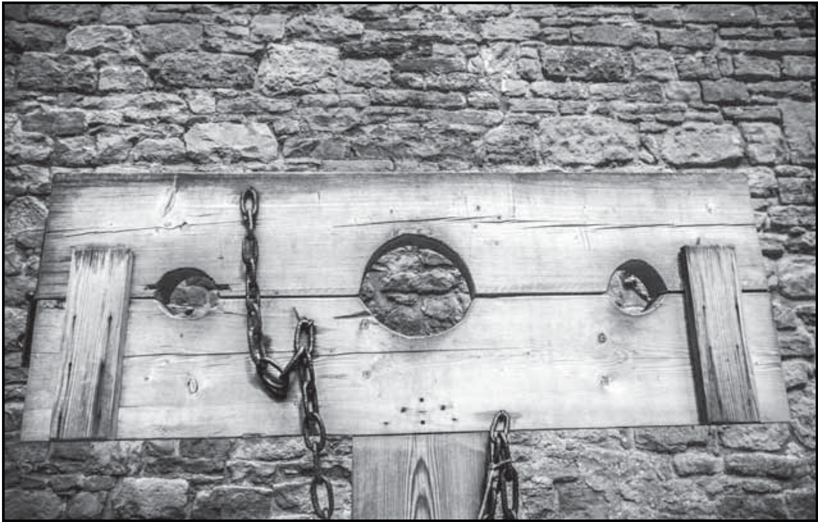
- Synonyms for maunder include *babble* and *prattle*, which means "to chatter meaninglessly and at length."

- Most sources state that *maunder* is probably related to, or a dialectical variant of, *meander*, which means "to wander aimlessly" and originally referred to winding rivers.

Pillory (noun)

To expose to (often public) ridicule, abuse, and scorn; to criticize harshly.

- From the Middle Ages up until the early 1800s in some places, *pillory* referred to a device used for public punishment: a wooden or metal frame with holes into which the head and hands of a



© Marbury/iStock/Thinkstock.

Pillories were purposely set up in marketplaces or at crossroads to add public humiliation to the punishment of the guilty.

person accused of a crime would be locked. Today, we use *pillory* as a verb, meaning “to expose to public ridicule.”

Jeremiad (noun)

A long lamentation or complaint; a bitter lament; a scolding speech or sermon.

- *Jeremiad*, like *bowdlerize* in the previous lecture, is an eponym, a word derived from someone’s name. *Jeremiad* is named after the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, who prophesied the imminent downfall of the Kingdom of Judah. Jeremiah’s prophecy came true, and in the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah laments the fall of the Kingdom of Judah.

- Often, *jeremiad* refers to a bitter lament about the state of society, particularly one containing a prophecy of doom. For example: “Her article was yet another jeremiad describing and lamenting the decay of morals in today’s society.”

Badinage (noun)

Light, playful banter; raillery.

- *Badinage* comes from the French word *badiner*, meaning "to jest, joke." It refers to good-natured teasing between people, as in the following: "In their classic films together, Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy were known for their witty repartee and charming badinage."

- Synonyms for *badinage* include *banter*, *back-and-forth*, *give-and-take*, *raillery*, and *repartee*. A related word is *riposte*, which means "a quick, witty comeback; a sharp reply in speech or action; a counterstroke." *Riposte* comes from fencing, where it refers to a quick thrust following a parry of an opponent's lunge.

Panegyric (noun)

Formal or elaborate praise; specifically, a formal speech or writing that offers praise.

- *Panegyric* refers to lofty, formal praise, such as that given in a speech. For example: "The general's panegyric for his fallen soldiers moved everyone to tears."

- Synonyms and words related to *panegyric* include *accolade*, *commendation*, *homage*, *tribute*, and *encomium*.

- *Panegyric* is derived from two Greek roots: *pan* ("all") and *agora* ("marketplace"). The combination of the two yields the image of a formal speech of praise delivered to all those assembled in a public meeting place.

Paean (noun)

1. A joyous song or hymn of praise, thanksgiving, or triumph.
2. Speech or writing that expresses enthusiastic praise.

- In ancient Greece, a paean was a hymn of invocation or thanksgiving to Apollo or another Greek deity. Today, the word is used more generally to refer to a hymn of praise or thanksgiving or to speech or writing that expresses praise.

- *Paean* is often used for critical acclaim of books, plays, and movies, as in: "The play received a paean from the usually negative critics."

Claptrap (noun)

Pretentious nonsense; insincere speech.

- Originally, *claptrap* meant speech or any artifice through which a person tried to trap an audience into clapping. The noun can still carry that same meaning today.

- Not surprisingly, *claptrap* is often used to describe political speeches, as in: "His fiery speech may have riled up his base supporters for the primary, but it was largely partisan claptrap that won't play well in the general election." The use of *claptrap* is not, however, restricted to politics alone. You might hear claptrap at work from your colleagues or at a neighborhood get-together from the local blowhard.

- English has at least 40 synonyms for *claptrap*, including *sham*, *hokum*, *tripe*, *tosh*, *bosh*, *rubbish*, *humbug*, *poppycock*, *balderdash*, *blarney*, *bombast*, *babble*, *blather*, *twaddle*, and many others.

Bunk (noun)

Foolish, untrue talk; nonsense.

- *Bunk* is a *toponym*, that is, a word named after a place. Buncombe is a county in North Carolina that was represented in 1820 by a congressman named Felix Walker. In one session, as Walker was making a longwinded speech, his fellow congressmen called for him to sit down, but he refused, saying that he was not speaking to

the House but to the voters in Buncombe. In other words, Walker wanted to make a speech that would be printed in the papers back home to prove to his constituents that he was working hard.

- Because Walker's speech was long on wind and short on substance, *bunkum*, with a change in spelling from the place name, became a term for lofty political mumbo-jumbo. *Bunkum* was later shortened to *bunk*.

Palaver (noun)

1. Profuse and idle chit-chat; chatter; empty talk; nonsense.
2. Flattery and sweet talk used to persuade.

- *Palaver* brings to mind the buzz of conversation among students in the few minutes before class starts. Consider, for example, this context sentence: "The high school English teacher, annoyed at the incessant chattering in class, said, 'Let's put an end to this palaver and start our discussion of *Macbeth*.'"

Pablum (noun)

Trite, insipid, or simplistic writing, speech, or conceptualization.

- Originally, *pablum* was the trademark name for a soft, bland, mushy, easy-to-digest cereal developed for infants and invalids in the 1930s. It's now used in a figurative sense to refer to bland, simplistic, or trite speech or ideas.

- *Pablum* was derived from the related word *pabulum*, which can refer to a nourishing substance or to insipid intellectual nourishment.

- A wonderful synonym for *pablum* is *pap*. Like *pablum*, *pap* also originally referred to soft food for infants and is now used to refer to an oversimplified idea or something lacking substance, as in: "That white paper from the think tank is just intellectual pap."

Roots for "Speak"

- We'll end this lecture with three powerful roots that center on the meaning of "speak." We've touched on some of these roots and derived words in earlier lectures, but reviewing them will help you make connections among words and learn new, unfamiliar words in the future.

- The Latin root usually spelled *loc* or *loq* means "speak." Our key word for this root is *ventriloquist*; other words we've studied that share this root are *soliloquy*, *loquacious*, and *obloquy*. Some additional derived words include the following:
    - *elocution*: the art of public speaking
    - *eloquent*: characterized by fluency and persuasiveness in speech or writing
    - *colloquium*: a conference, usually academic, at which specialists and experts speak on particular topics
    - *colloquial*: speaking in an informal way
    - *grandiloquent*: overblown, bombastic speech
    - *interlocutor*: someone who takes part in a conversation or dialogue between people; often used in a political sense to refer to an informal middleman between parties in the preliminary stages of negotiations

- The Latin root *dic*/*dict* also means "speak." English words derived from this root include *diction*, *dictate*, *dictionary*, *predict*, *verdict*, *benediction*, *edict*, and *indict*.

- Finally, the Latin *voc* means "call." English words derived from this root include *vocal*, *vociferous*, *advocate*, *avocation*, *convocation*, *equivocal*, and *invocation*.

Review Questions

1. What might you call the light, playful banter that occurs between two people on a first date?

2. And what might you call the sweet talk used by one member of the couple to secure a second date?

3. These two close synonyms are often used to refer to meaningless political speech.

4. The minister delivered a __________ from the pulpit against permissive parenting.

5. The CEO's __________ to Pat at his retirement party received a standing ovation from his fellow employees.

6. A visit from her mother-in-law inevitably meant two hours of complaining and __________.

7. Bob delivered a moving __________ to his son, who had fought a heroic battle against cancer.

8. The city councilwoman was __________ in the press for her refusal to vote in favor of a raise for law enforcement officers.

9. The best that can be said about the __________ served up on television these days is that it might drive more patrons to the library.

Eponyms from Literature and History

Lecture 17

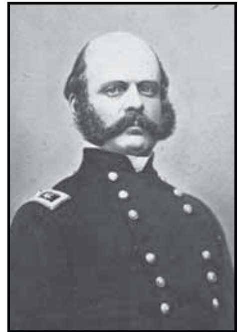
In this lecture, we'll explore eponyms—words named after people. The word *eponym* is a combination of the Greek prefix *ep*- or *epi*-, meaning "on" or "upon," and the Greek noun *onuma*, meaning "name." Thus, an eponym is a word built on someone's name. English is replete with eponyms, such as *bloomers* (named after women's rights advocate Amelia Bloomer), *sideburns* (Civil War General Ambrose Burnside), and *sandwich* (the fourth earl of Sandwich). To become a true eponym, a word must acquire its own meaning independent of the original story behind it. When that happens, most language users aren't even aware of the person behind the word. In this lecture, we'll learn about the people and stories behind eight eponyms.[1]

Draconian (adjective)

Exceedingly harsh; very severe; cruel.

- In Athens of the 7th century B.C.E., justice was largely carried out according to oral law; personal vendettas and blood feuds were usually the deciding factors in determining guilt and punishment. If someone in a family was killed, it was up to the family—not the state—to seek justice.

- In response to this situation, the Athenian legislator Draco set forth what was probably Athens's first comprehensive code



© Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division/ LC-DIG-ppmsca-35451.

The word *sideburns* comes from the Union Civil War General Ambrose Burnside, known for the unusually thick whiskers on the sides of his face.

[1] The following sources were particularly helpful in the creation of this lecture: John Ayto's *Dictionary of Word Origins: The Histories of More Than 8,000 English-Language Words*, *The Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories*, *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edition).

of written laws, disseminated around 621 B.C.E. For each crime, the code mandated only one penalty: death. The harshness of Draco's laws became legendary and led to the coining of the word *draconian*.

- Fortunately for the Athenians, Solon, a later Athenian statesman, repealed almost all of Draco's laws around 594 B.C.E. However, Solon was wise enough to keep Draco's homicide law, which made the state, not the family, responsible for justice in murder. *Solon* has since come into English as a noun referring to a wise and skilled lawgiver.

Quixotic (adjective)

Romantically impractical or impulsive.

- *Quixotic* comes from the name Don Quixote, the main character in a Spanish novel written by Miguel de Cervantes in the early 1600s, *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*.

- As you may know, the novel follows the adventures of a retired country gentleman who is so profoundly influenced by reading books of chivalry that he decides to sally forth as a knight-errant to right wrongs, save fair maidens, and generally uphold the knight's code. With a distorted perception of reality and a romantic view of the world, he renames himself Don Quixote and, among many other adventures, attacks windmills he mistakenly believes are giants.

- Connecting the character of Don Quixote to *quixotic* is probably the best way to remember this word. Or you might make a personal connection with a time when you did something completely crazy, a bit romantic, or totally impractical.

Gerrymander (noun/verb)

noun: The act of dividing election districts to give one party an unfair advantage.

verb: To divide election districts unfairly.

- Elbridge Gerry was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, delegate to the Second Continental Congress, vice president of the United States under James Madison, and governor of Massachusetts. Despite this impressive resume, Gerry is most well-known for a specific type of political skulduggery that is still practiced and still controversial today.

- In 1812, during his second term as governor of Massachusetts, Gerry's administration introduced a bill that would redraw the state's congressional election districts to benefit Gerry's Democratic-Republican Party. Although this certainly was not the first time a political party had tried to use redistricting for political advantage, this attempt was so blatant that it was noted by the opposition Federalist Party during the campaign.

- In fact, the redrawn map of Essex County, Gerry's home territory, was shown at a Federalist Party meeting. Noticing the odd shape of the newly drawn district, one of the Federalists drew his own version of the outline on the map: a serpent-like creature with claws and wings. The Federalist proclaimed, "That will do for a salamander," and according to one account, another party member quipped, "Gerrymander," coining the word.

- Notice that *gerrymander* is both an eponym and a portmanteau word—a combination of two or more unrelated word parts. In this case, *gerrymander* is a combination of *Gerry*, a person's name, and *salamander*.

Quisling (noun)

A traitor who aids an invading and/or occupying enemy force, often serving later in the puppet government.

- Born in 1887, Vidkun Quisling was a Norwegian army officer and politician. In 1933, he became the leader of Norway's Fascist Party, and in 1939, he met with Adolf Hitler, asking Hitler to invade

and occupy Norway. Quisling hoped to lead a new Norwegian government with German support.

- As we know, Germany invaded Norway in April 1940. During this invasion, Quisling asked his fellow Norwegians not to resist; he then proclaimed himself head of Norway's new government. However, Quisling lasted only a week as prime minister. There was such vehement opposition among Norwegians to Quisling's German-supported power grab that even the Germans themselves withdrew their support.

- However, this wasn't the end for the Norwegian traitor. The Germans set up a puppet government during their occupation of Norway in which Quisling went on to serve as a figurehead. In this role, he tried to force-feed National Socialism to Norwegian churches and schools.

- Because of his actions, Quisling became known as a traitor. According to the *OED*, it was the *London Times*, on April 15, 1940, that first used the term *quisling* as a synonym for "traitor," reporting: "There should be unremitting vigilance also against possible 'Quislings' inside the country." Within a month, *quisling* had been used by the great CBS News correspondent Edward R. Murrow, and it can be found in the wartime writings of Winston Churchill, George Orwell, and C. S. Lewis.

- Why did this particular word catch on so quickly and universally? Why do some words catch on and others don't? The answer may lie in a combination of factors.
  - For example, the historical context may play a role. In the case of *quisling*, the strong reaction of so many people against one individual certainly contributed to the adoption of the word.

  - The sound of the word may also influence its adoption. In this case, the *London Star* of July 10, 1940, reported that the sound of the name *Quisling* "conveyed all the odious, greasy wickedness of the man." The *London Times* further ventured

that *Quisling* brought to mind other *Q* words with negative connotations, such as *quavering*, *quivering*, and *querulous*.

- Although the term *quisling* has lived on, Quisling himself didn't last any longer than the war. With Norway's liberation at the end of World War II, Quisling was found guilty of treason and war crimes and was executed.

Bedlam (noun)

A place or situation of noisy uproar and confusion.

- The story of *bedlam* starts nearly 800 years ago in England, when Simon FitzMary, former sheriff of London, founded the Priory of St. Mary of Bethlehem in 1247. Around 1330, this religious house was converted into a hospital. Less than 100 years later, St. Mary's began to admit mental patients, and by the 16th century, it was converted into a state asylum for the insane.

- By the 1400s, the word *Bethlehem* in the hospital's name had been telescoped into *bedlam*, and the word was used to refer to a patient of the Bethlehem hospital. This meaning was later extended to refer to patients of any lunatic asylum or to any person suffering from insanity.

- In the 1700s, it was not uncommon for members of the upper class to take a trip to St. Mary's to watch the mentally ill patients as a form of entertainment. We can imagine what a disorderly scene that must have been, with the unfortunate patients on display to throngs of visitors. With that image in mind, we can also see how the term *bedlam*, which was initially used to refer to any "madhouse," was extended to the more figurative sense of a "scene of noisy, mad confusion."

Luddite (noun)

Anyone who opposes the introduction of technological change.

- The original Luddites were a group of English craftsmen who organized themselves into an activist workers group in 1811. Because the Luddites feared that the introduction of new machinery would put them out of work, they began destroying the machinery.

- The *OED* etymology for *luddite* is drawn from Pellew's *Life of Lord Sidmouth* (1847). According to this source, the Luddites took their name from Ned Ludd, "a person of weak intellect" who destroyed some equipment used to make stockings in an English village around 1779.

- *Luddite* has been used as a proper noun since 1811, the year of the Luddites' inception, to refer to that specific group. However, it entered English as a common noun—referring to anyone who opposes the introduction of new technology—relatively recently, in 1961. At that time, the old term—meaning "resistance against progress"—found a new, specific meaning—"resistance against computers."

Billingsgate (noun)

Foul, coarse, abusive language.

- The word *billingsgate* is actually a *toponym*—"a word named after a place"—rather than an eponym. Billingsgate, now one of London's 25 wards, originally was a water gate in the river wall on the north bank of the Thames. Over the centuries, Billingsgate developed into a market, particularly a fish market.

- The market at Billingsgate became well-known for something besides the fish: the vulgar, abusive, and coarse language that one heard while shopping there. In particular, it was the female fishmongers who were notorious for their creative and biting profanity.

- The fishwives of Billingsgate and the market itself became so well known for this obscene language that references to the place

were not uncommon in English literature. The word became a true toponym in the late 18th century, when it began to be used as a common noun to describe particularly foul, coarse, and abusive language.

Malapropism (noun)

A ridiculous and often humorous misuse of words, particularly words that sound similar but are different in meaning.

- *Malapropism* came into our language from an 18th-century English comedy, *The Rivals*, by Richard Brinsley Sheridan. In this play, a character named Mrs. Malaprop misuses words, often to humorous effect.

- Mrs. Malaprop's name comes in part from the French word *apropos*, literally meaning "to the purpose." The word is used to mean "fitting, appropriate, pertinent." *Mal*- is a prefix that means "bad, evil, or ill." The combination of the two means "inappropriate" or "inopportune."

- We hear malapropisms come out of the mouths of children, celebrities, sports stars, politicians—and even ourselves. A famous example comes from Richard Daley, former mayor of Chicago, who once said, "The police are not here to create disorder; they're here to preserve disorder" (yourdictionary.com).

Review Questions

1. You might think this political practice had faded into history, but it's still used in local, state, and national elections today.

2. Rose is such a __________ that she refuses to purchase a computer or even a cell phone.

3. The baseball player Yogi Berra is remembered for many humorous quotes, such as "He hits from both sides of the plate. He's amphibious." What might you call this particular misuse of words?

4. Chris emitted a steady stream of __________ whenever he watched the nightly news.

5. Leaking national secrets on the Internet marked him as a 21st-century __________.

6. The teacher was forced to institute __________ punishments to reduce the all-out __________ that her classroom had become.

7. Jerry's wife said that his purchase of a red convertible was the most __________ behavior her husband had ever exhibited.

Thinking, Teaching, and Learning Words

Lecture 18

According to the Greek historian Plutarch, "The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled." Good teachers take this quote to mean that education does not involve simply lecturing to students but actively engaging them to construct meaning in an inspiring way. Learning, in other words, is active. It's also true that our minds are innately disposed to detect patterns. In the process of learning, we look and listen for patterns we already know to help us remember, store, and retrieve information. In this lecture, we'll explore words related to thinking, teaching, and learning and, as always, apply some strategies for identifying patterns and similarities among words to help us remember them.

Induction (noun)

The process of inferring general principles from individual facts or instances.

Deduction (noun)

The process of reasoning in which a conclusion necessarily follows from the stated premises.

- Induction is bottom-up reasoning, that is, moving from the specific to the general. Deduction is the opposite of induction; it's top-down reasoning, moving from the general to the specific.

- Deductive reasoning is often introduced in philosophy with the following syllogistic argument:
    - All men are mortal.
    - Socrates is a man.
    - Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

- Notice that this argument moves from a general statement about humanity to the specific case of Socrates. Also note that the conclusion necessarily follows from the premises.

- *Deduction* derives from a combination of the Latin prefix *de*-, meaning "down from, away," and *duc* (from Latin *duco*), meaning "lead." Thus, a deduction "leads down" from general principles to the specific.

Exegesis (noun)

An explanation or critical interpretation, especially of the Bible or another religious text.

© anyaivanova/iStock/Thinkstock.

***Exegesis* is a transliteration of a Greek word meaning "explanation, interpretation"; to remember this word, think of time when a teacher helped you make sense of a particularly difficult reading assignment.**

Perspicacious (adjective)

Having or showing keen mental perception.

- In the 1950s, the theory of behaviorism dominated the social sciences. Popularized by the writings of psychologists John B. Watson and B. F. Skinner, behaviorism argued that all behavior, including language, could be explained by a few laws of stimulus and response.
  - Noam Chomsky, now widely recognized as the father of modern linguistics but a relatively unknown scholar at the time, saw holes in this theory that others missed. He revolutionized the field of linguistics by famously critiquing Skinner's book *Verbal Behavior*.

  - As described by Steven Pinker in *The Language Instinct*, Chomsky's critique of behaviorism was twofold: First, he argued that if language is simply a collection of learned responses, we would be unable to come up with novel sentences. Second, he pointed out that children have an innate instinct for language and the ability to generate linguistic rules.

  - Chomsky, in other words, was far too perspicacious to be taken in by the claims of behaviorism. He perceived gaps in the theory that others had missed.

- *Perspicacious* comes from the Latin prefix *per*-, meaning "through," and the Latin root that is usually spelled *spec* or *spic*, meaning "look." In other words, those who are perspicacious have the ability to "look through" the surface of things.

- Synonyms and related words for *perspicacious* include *acute*, *astute*, *discerning*, *penetrating*, *sagacious*, and *sapient*.

Didactic (adjective)

Inclined to teach or moralize excessively.

- *Didactic* carries with it a connotation of preachy and boring. For example: "The professor's didactic lecture style was known for putting her students to sleep."

- Synonyms for *didactic* include *preachy*, *donnish*, and *sermonize*. *Pedantic* is another synonym, but it has a slightly different meaning: characterized by a narrow, often ostentatious concern for book learning and formal rules. In other words, *didactic* emphasizes excessive teaching, while *pedantic* emphasizes excessive attention to trivia, often to show off.

Philistine (noun)

A person who is uninterested in intellectual pursuits and indifferent or hostile to artistic and cultural values.

- *Philistine* is a rich vocabulary word with a wonderful history going back to biblical times. The original Philistines were the inhabitants of the southern coast of ancient Palestine. Enemies of the Israelites, the Philistines were known for being aggressive and crude. Since the 1600s, the word *philistine* was used to refer humorously to one's enemies.

- However, the modern meaning of *philistine* as a boorish person seems to have originated in the German town of Jena in 1687.
  - A town-versus-gown confrontation between the people of Jena and the students at the local university led to several deaths. In response, a local clergyman delivered a sermon to the townspeople on the value of education and quoted a passage from the Book of Judges: "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson."

    - The university students took this sermon and ran with it, using the German word for *philistine*, *philister*, to refer to those ignorant townspeople who were opposed to education.

- But it was Matthew Arnold, an English poet and literary critic, who took the final step, translating the German *philister* to *philistine* and using the word in his book *Culture and Anarchy*. Since the book's publication in 1869, *philistine*—carrying its current meaning—has been used widely by English authors.

Erudite (adjective)

> Learned or scholarly; characterized by deep and extensive knowledge.

- *Erudite* comes from the Latin verb *erudio, meaning "*to educate, teach, instruct." This Latin word, in turn, is derived from the Latin preposition *ex* ("out of") and the Latin adjective *rudis* ("unpolished, rough, unlearned"). Those who are erudite are literally "brought out of a rough, raw, unlearned state"—polished through education.

- Synonyms for *erudite* include *lettered*, *brainy*, *scholarly*, and *learned*.

Recondite (adjective)

> Difficult to understand.

- Something that perhaps goes beyond erudite or scholarly may be described as *recondite*, meaning "difficult to understand." For example: "Although the recondite economics paper contained some important findings, it didn't make an impact because few could understand it."

Esoteric (adjective)

> Understood by only a select group.

- *Esoteric* describes secret or specialized knowledge that might seem mysterious because it's known only to an enlightened inner circle. For example: "The intricacies of the software program seemed esoteric to everyone but the programmers."

- Both *esoteric* and *recondite* can describe knowledge that is beyond the power of the average person to understand. However, *recondite* is used to stress the fact that it's the profundity of the ideas and remoteness of the subject to normal interests that make it difficult to comprehend. *Esoteric* is used to stress the idea that the knowledge is secret, guarded, or known by only a select group of initiates or students.

The *gn*(*o*) Root: "Know"

- The Greek root that means "know," usually spelled *gn*(*o*), is a powerful one that gives us many derived words, including *cognition*, "the act or process of knowing," as well as *recognition*, *incognito*, and *cognizant*.

- You may have encountered the related words *gnosis*, referring to secret knowledge of spiritual mysteries, and *Gnosticism*, a religious movement of the 2nd century C.E. Gnosticism claimed that salvation came from acquiring secret, esoteric knowledge.

- Other words derived from *gn*(*o*) include *agnostic*, *diagnosis*, *ignorant*, and *prognosis* and *prognosticate*—both sharing the core meaning of "knowing something before."

Review Questions

1. When Carl refused to see any movie with subtitles, Janet denounced him as a __________.

2. Dr. Nolan's keen insights into the science of thermodynamics were characteristic of her __________ mind.

3. The minister's __________ style of preaching carried over into his personal life, all but putting his guests to sleep at the dinner table.

4. Nonetheless, his __________ of individual Bible verses was insightful and inspiring to his congregation.

5. Differentiate among *erudite*, *recondite*, and *esoteric*.

6. Differentiate between *induction* and *deduction*.

Words for the Diligent and the Lazy

Lecture 19

We've all heard the aphorism that there's no substitute for hard work. But if you've ever worked with any group, you know that not everyone is a hard worker. Some people are diligent and dogged and will persistently plug away until a job's done. Others are highly skilled, competent, and technically adroit; these professionals have the expertise to do the job and do it well. Still others are cheerful and optimistic; they give their fellow workers a shot of energy when they're flagging. Finally, there are always a few who are downright lazy, sluggish, or apathetic. In this lecture, we'll discover some new words to describe all these different types of working and doing.

Sedulous (adjective)

Diligent in application or in the pursuit of something; persevering; constant in effort.

- *Sedulous* can describe both people and their work. In the following context sentence, it applies to the work of the carpenter: "The sedulous workmanship of the master carpenter was evident in the perfection of every detail of the stunning table, from the exquisitely turned legs to the tight-fitting tongue-and-groove joints."

- Synonyms for *sedulous* include *diligent*, *assiduous*, *persistent*, *tenacious*, and *pertinacious*.
    - The last words in this list, *tenacious* and *pertinacious*, are related, but they are not exact synonyms. As observed by Rod L. Evans in *The Artful Nuance*, *tenacious* has a positive connotation, suggesting a determined adherence to a course of action or holding fast despite opposing forces. For example: "The cancer survivor's tenacious spirit—overcoming years of setbacks, chemotherapy, and radiation—inspired others."

  - *Pertinacious* shares the basic meaning of holding resolutely to a course of action, purpose, or opinion, but it carries a negative connotation of being so tenacious as to become stubborn or obstinate. For example: "The pertinacious questioning of the high-strung student annoyed his professor and the rest of his classmates so much that the professor gave up on holding open discussions in class."

Facile (adjective)

Done or achieved with little effort or difficulty; easy; performed with effortless ease and fluency.

- *Facile* can be used to describe work, actions, speech, or movements, as in the following context sentence: "The professor's facile wit kept his students on their toes and engaged throughout the class." The word is often used to describe people who are highly skilled and at ease in a particular field of endeavor.

- *Facile* is derived from the Latin root *fac* ("make or do"), which we explored in an earlier lecture. People who are facile can "do" things easily and effortlessly. *Fac* is also commonly spelled in three other ways: *fec* (*effective*), *fic* (*artificial*), and *-fy*, a verb-forming suffix form of this root, meaning "to make into." We see this *-fy* suffix in such words as *sanctify* ("to make sacred or holy"), *magnify* ("to make larger"), *dulcify* ("to make sweeter"), and *stupefy* ("to stun"; literally, "to make into a stupor").

- Two other words that are closely related to *facile* are *facility* and *facilitate*. A person who has the facility for a task or job possesses the aptitude or skill to do it easily and effortlessly. *Facilitate*, of course, means to make doing something easier. To remember these related words, you might connect them in your vocabulary notebook with the following sentence: "A facile person has the facility to facilitate work."

- Synonyms and related words for *facile* include *skilled*, *adroit*, *adept*, *dexterous*, and *proficient*.

- In addition to having a positive connotation, *facile* may also have a negative one; that is, something can be done with too much ease, showing little care or attention to detail. For example: “His facile answer on the essay portion of the exam earned him a D overall.”

Alacrity (noun)

A quick and cheerful readiness and eagerness to do something.

- People who do their work quickly, willingly, and promptly are said to work with alacrity, as in the following context sentence: “She dove into the research paper assignment with alacrity, illustrating the importance of giving students some flexibility in choosing their topics.”

- Synonyms for *alacrity* include *vivacity*, *animation*, *sprightliness*, *ebullience*, *get-up-and-go*, *vim and vigor*, *liveliness*, *zeal*, *avidity*, and *expedition*.

Indolent (adjective)

Habitually lazy and slow; tending to avoid exertion.

- *Indolent* is used to describe laggards, slackers, loafers, clock-watchers, do-nothings, malingerers, and procrastinators. Consider, for example, this context sentence: “The indolent writer never made it out of bed before noon; he was usually too lazy to check the credibility of his sources and rarely made his deadlines.”

- The great 20th-century British moral philosopher Bernard Williams once observed, “I like the word ‘indolence.’ It makes my laziness seem classy.”

- Synonyms for *indolent* include *sluggish*, *idle*, *lackadaisical*, *languid*, *lethargic*, *listless*, and *slothful*.

Torpor (noun)

Sluggishness; a state of mental or physical inactivity; lethargy, apathy.

Torpid (adjective)

Slow, sluggish, lethargic, dull, benumbed.

- *Torpor* and *torpid* come from the Latin word *torpeo*, meaning "to be numb, inactive, or dull." The ancient Romans used this word to refer fish that numbed their prey with an electric shock. In the 16th century, the English used the word *torpedo* for the same type of fish, known today as electric rays. In the early 1800s, Robert Fulton chose the name *torpedo* for the floating device he invented that exploded on contact with a ship, although today we would call such devices mines.

- Consider *torpor* and *torpid* in the following context sentences: (1) "The teenage boys were aroused from their torpor by the promise of all the free pizza they could eat," and (2) "We've finally broken out of the torpid economic growth following the recession." You might also hear these words used to describe the mind and ideas, as in: "Not having read or discussed anything stimulating for more than 40 years, his mind had grown torpid from lack of use."

Turbid (adjective)

1. Muddy, thick, or opaque with sediment; obscured; clouded.
2. Confused, muddled, disordered.

- *Torpid* and *torpor* are commonly confused with *turbid* and *turgid*. *Turbid* is often used to describe roiled, muddy water or liquid that's heavy, thick, and dense, as in: "The turbid river, full of mud and

debris from the flood, made it nearly impossible for the rescue teams to recover the missing." *Turbid* can also be used in a more figurative sense to describe something that is confused, muddled, or disordered, as in: "The writer's turbid prose confused her readers."

- *Turbid* includes the root *turb*, which comes from the Latin word *turba*, meaning "turmoil or confusion." The root can also carry the connotation of "spinning and whirling." Other words that share the *turb* root include *turbulent*, *disturb*, *perturb*, *imperturbable*, and *turbine*.

Turgid (adjective)

Swollen, distended, puffy.

- *Turgid* can refer to physical swollenness, as in: "The disease had ravaged his body, leading to swollen limbs and turgid facial features." It can also be used in a more figurative sense to refer to language that is swollen, pompous, and bombastic, as in: "The love song's turgid lyrics and hackneyed expressions made it unpopular with listeners."

Roots for "Work"

- The Latin root *oper* means "work" and is found in such words as *operate*, *cooperate*, *cooperative*, *uncooperative*, *inoperable*, *opus* (a work or composition), *magnum opus* (literally, a "great work"), and *opera* (borrowed into English from the Italian *opera*, literally meaning "a work, labor, or composition").

- The Greek root *erg* also means "work." This root is found in such words as *energy* (the capacity or power to do work), *erg* (a unit of work or energy), *ergonomics* (the study of the relationship between workers and their environments), *synergy* (the combined effect of working together), *metallurgy* (the science of working with or extracting metals), and *ergophobia* (the fear of work).

Review Questions

1. Synonyms for this word include adept, skilled, and dexterous.

2. These two words both refer to sluggishness.

3. These two words might be considered opposite approaches to work.

4. Colleen watched in horror as the __________ river, __________ from the flood, swallowed her beloved car.

5. Hadeem always approached his work with __________, making him a valued employee.

Words That Break and Words That Join

Lecture 20

You've probably heard Neil Sedaka's hit song from 1962, "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do." Of course, that's not the only pop song that deals with the heartache of saying goodbye. In fact, breaking up, getting back together, and breaking up again have been a staple of music for some time. Where would songwriters be without this ongoing human tension between joining together and pulling apart? Luckily for songwriters—and for the rest of us—English has a number of rich vocabulary words that center on the opposing concepts of breaking things apart and putting them together. In this lecture, we'll explore some of these target words.

Schism (noun)

A division among the members of a group into opposing factions because of a disagreement.

- Although an informal club can experience a schism, this word is often used in reference to divisions of a more serious nature, such as a rift within a profession, a region, a political party, or a religion. For example: "The high-stakes testing policies mandated by the federal government have opened a schism in the education community."

- Synonyms and related words for *schism* include *split*, *rift*, *division*, *parting of the ways*, *falling-out*, *fracture*, *rupture*, *fissure*, *breach*, and *cleft*.

- *Schism* comes from the Greek *schisma,* meaning "division, cleft," and is related to two other words you already know that can help you remember its meaning: *scissors*, which "cut or split" things in two, and *schizophrenia*, literally, the "splitting of the mind."

- You'll also hear the term *Great Schism* for the division of the Christian church during the period 1378–1417 into what would

later become the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Diaspora (noun)

The movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland.

- *Diaspora* comes from two Greek words, *dia* and *speirein*, that were joined together as a compound word meaning "to scatter across." The word was used in the Bible to refer to the scattering of the Jewish communities outside Palestine (or modern-day Israel) after their exile by the Babylonians. The word is capitalized in reference to this Jewish Diaspora.

- However, *diaspora* has added a more general meaning to describe any large movement or migration of people or culture. For example, "Many families who left their homeland during the diaspora struggled to retain their culture in their new country."

- *Diaspora* can also refer to the actual group of people who have settled far from their ancestral homelands or to the place where those people live.

Lacuna (noun)

A gap or hole where something should be.

- Have you ever wondered why English has gender-specific words for siblings (*brother* and *sister*) and gender-specific words for parents (*mother* and *father*) but no similar gender-specific words for male cousins and female cousins?
    - For that matter, why do we have collective terms for our mothers and fathers (*parents*) and for our sisters and brothers (*siblings*) but not for our aunts and uncles?

- In linguistics, such missing pieces are called *lexical gaps*. We might expect a word for something based on patterns found elsewhere in the language, but instead, we get a gap. This gap or break in the pattern is an example of a lacuna.

- *Lacuna* is often used to refer to a missing section of a book that has been censored or to a part of an ancient text that has gone missing. For example: "Although the ancient manuscript was recovered, the notably large lacuna at the beginning made the text confusing." In medicine, *lacuna* can refer to a small cavity in an anatomical structure, such as a bone.

- *Lacuna* comes from the Latin *lacuna*, meaning "hole or pit." Related words include *lake* and *lagoon*, which are holes or pits filled with water.

Maw (noun)

The mouth, throat, or gullet of an animal, particularly a carnivorous animal.

- *Maw* is a short, powerful word for the mouth and jaws of voracious, carnivorous beasts, as in: "Staring directly into the gaping maw of the ravenous lion, he lost all courage and ran away as fast as he could."
    - In addition, *maw* can be used to refer to a cavernous opening that resembles the jaws of an animal: "At the end of the horror movie, her soul is sucked down into the gaping maw of hell."

    - *Maw* can also be used in a more figurative sense to refer to the metaphorical center of a voracious appetite: "The paparazzi will go to any lengths to get scurrilous pictures of celebrities, knowing the need to feed the insatiable maw of the scandal-loving public."

- As is the case with many single-syllable words, *maw* is from an Old English word, in this case, *maga*, "stomach."

- English has a large number of synonyms and related words for *maw* or *mouth*, including *craw*, *gullet*, *jaws*, *muzzle*, *piehole*, *gob*, *yap*, *trap*, *chops*, and *kisser*.

Two Latin Roots: *rupt* and *junct*

- The Latin root *rupt* means "break" and gives us a number of derived words, including *rupture*, *bankrupt*, *disrupt*, *interrupt*, and *erupt*. One *rupt* word you might not be familiar with is *irruption*. The initial *ir-* in this word is an absorbed prefix, a variant spelling of the prefix *in-*, meaning "into." Thus, an irruption is a sudden, violent breaking or bursting in. This word is used to describe a sudden increase in the plant or animal population of a region.

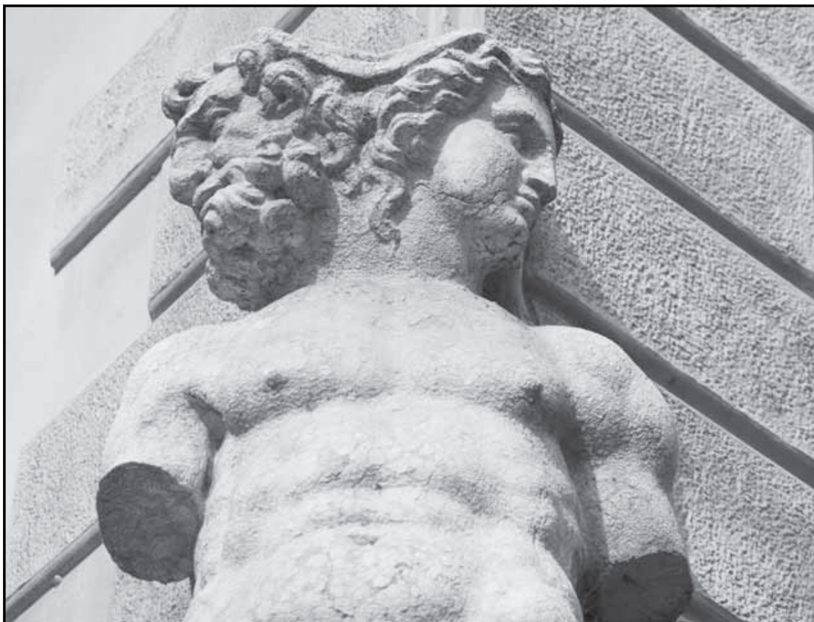
- In direct contrast to *rupt*, meaning "break," is the Latin root *junct*, meaning "join." This root appears in such words as *juncture* (the time, place, or point at which two things are joined) and *conjunction* (a word that joins other words together).

Cleave (verb)

1. To split or divide by cutting.
2. To stick closely to; to cling to.

- The word *cleave* has two meanings that are the exact opposite of each other: to split apart and to stick closely to. Such words that are their own antonyms are called *contronyms*, or *Janus words*, named after the Roman god Janus, who is the two-faced god of gates, doorways, and beginning and endings.
    - *Buckle* is another Janus word, meaning either "to fasten together," as in "I buckled my belt," or to "bend and break," as in "My knees buckled."

    - In the same way, *bolt* can mean either "to secure and lock," as in "Bolt the door," or "to run; to make a sudden, swift dash," as in "The rabbit bolted toward the undergrowth when it saw the dog."



© Kizel/iStock/Thinkstock.

The Romans named January in honor of the two-faced god Janus because this month is at the end of one year and the beginning of the next.

- The first meaning of *cleave*, "to split or divide by cutting," appears in this context sentence: "If you want to cleave the roast, use the sharp meat cleaver." You might also hear *cleave* used in the sense of "to make or create by cutting or dividing," as in: "The swift sailboat cleaved a path through the choppy water."

- The second definition of *cleave*, "to cling to; adhere closely to; stick to," appears in this sentence: "The baby boy cleaved to his mother." *Cleave* can also be used figuratively with this second meaning; for example: "Despite the temptations of college life, he cleaved to the principles his parents had instilled in him in his youth."

- The reason *cleave* has two opposite meanings is that it really is two distinct words that happen to be spelled in the same way. These two meanings evolved from two different words of Germanic origin.

Concatenation (noun)

A series of things that are linked together.

- *Concatenation* refers to a chain-like series of ideas or events, such as the events that cause a person's life to go in a certain direction or reach a particular point. For example, consider the word in this context sentence: "All of our lives can be seen as a concatenation of events that has led us to where we are today."

- You can remember this word by breaking it down into two parts. The first part is the prefix *con*-, which is a variant of the Latin preposition *cum*, meaning "with, together." The second part is the Latin base, *catena*, which means "a chain."

Cabal (noun)

1. A small group of people secretly working together.
2. A secret plot.

- The first meaning of *cabal* is illustrated in the following context sentence: "The fourth-grade cabal of Jimmy, Zach, and Trent had secretly plotted to start a food fight at lunch, but the conspirators were ratted out by a classmate and punished by Principal Zimmerman." The second meaning appears in this sentence: "In this time of political and civil unrest, the opposition party's cabal to overthrow the government by force just might work."

- *Cabal* originally comes from Kabbala, a Jewish mystical method of interpreting scripture that became associated with the secret and the occult. The word was popularized and given its current meaning by a 17th-century cabal of five English ministers who served under King Charles II. The members of this powerful royal council were named Clifford, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley, and Lauderdale. By a strange coincidence, the initial letters of their names spelled *cabal*.

Coterie (noun)

A small, often select group of people who associate with one another frequently and share a common interest, background, or purpose.

- *Coterie* has a similar meaning to *cabal* but without the added sense of secrecy and the connotation of treachery. For example: "A tight-knit coterie of presidential advisors made all the important decisions in the administration."

- Synonyms and related words for *coterie* include *sisterhood* or *brotherhood*, *society*, *troop*, *sect* (often used to identify a religious group that may be exclusive and may deviate from mainstream religious traditions), *faction* (often a dissentious unit within a larger group), *clique* (a snobby, exclusive group), *band*, *ring*, *circle*, *cadre*, *gang*, and *clan*.

Review Questions

1. An interesting __________ of circumstances led to Martin's career as a clown.

2. The lab didn't know if it would ever be able to fill the __________ left by the retirement of Dr. Dagley.

3. The new high-stakes testing policies mandated by the federal government have opened a __________ in the education community.

4. This word has a number of colorful synonyms, including *craw*, *gullet*, *piehole*, and *muzzle*.

5. Give the two opposite meanings of the contronym *cleave*.

6. Differentiate between the words *cabal* and *coterie*.

7. For many Jews, the __________ that began in the 6th century B.C. continues to this day.

Some High-Utility Greek and Latin Affixes

Lecture 21

In our earlier lecture on Latin and Greek roots, we identified three main goals: (1) to explore some powerful affixes and roots that aren't fully covered in other lectures, (2) to discuss how these affixes and roots combine to form words, and (3) to learn a few more target vocabulary words. With these three goals in mind, we'll explore some additional Greek and Latin affixes and roots in this lecture. As we've seen, studying these affixes and roots capitalizes on the tendency of the brain to categorize knowledge through patterns and meaning.

A High-Utility Prefix: *de*-

- The Latin-derived prefix *de*- is found in many words, but it can be tricky because it carries a number of different meanings, including "remove, undo" and "down, out of, away from."

- The "remove, undo" meaning is seen in such words as *defrost*, *decaffeinate*, and *defuse*. The "down, out of, away from" meaning is found in *deflate*, which comes from the Latin *deflo*, which means "to blow away."

Denude (verb)

To lay bare; to strip; to make nude.

- You may encounter a literal sense of *denude*, as in the following context sentence: "The hillside had been denuded of trees by clear-cut mining." *Denude* might also be used in a figurative sense of stripping something away or depriving someone of something important. Consider this context sentence: "The constant criticism by the captious boss denuded the small company of its once tightknit camaraderie."

- As you probably suspect, the *de*- in *denude* means “away.” The *nude* comes from the Latin verb *nudo* meaning “to strip.”

A Fertile Prefix: *ab*-

- The Latin preposition *ab*- meant “off, away”; thus, this prefix is close in meaning to one of the *de*- meanings we’ve just seen. The *ab*- prefix appears in such words as *absent*, *abnormal*, and *abduct*.

Abdicate (verb)

> To renounce or relinquish a throne, right, power, or responsibility.

- When we look at *abdicate*, the *ab*- prefix immediately stands out. What’s left is the word part *dicate*, which contains the root *dic*, meaning “speak.” Thus, etymologically, *abdicate* means “to speak away” and originally meant to “disown and disinherit one’s children.” In fact, it wasn’t until the 1600s that *abdicate* began to take on the meaning of giving up a public office or power.

Abnegate (verb)

> **1.** To deny or renounce.
>
> **2.** To relinquish power.

- Again, if we look at the word parts of *abnegate*, we immediately see *ab*-, meaning “away.” The remaining part, *negate*, comes from the Latin *nego*, “to deny.” Etymologically, when you abnegate, you “deny something away.”

- The second meaning of *abnegate*, “to relinquish power,” often causes confusion with *abdicate*. However, according to vocabulary.com, *abdicate* is usually reserved for offices of higher power. In other words, you’re more likely to hear of a queen abdicating the throne and a project manager abnegating responsibility.

Ablution (noun)

The washing of one’s body, or part of it, especially as a religious ritual.

- The second word part of *ablution* comes from the Latin verb *luo*, meaning “wash.” English words that contain the *lu* root often have something to do with washing, such as *deluge*, a torrential downpour.

Antediluvian (adjective)

1. Of or relating to the period before the biblical flood.
2. Very old-fashioned, out of date, antiquated, or primitive.

- *Antediluvian* was originally coined by Sir Thomas Browne in the 1600s by combining the Latin preposition *ante*, meaning “before,” with the Latin noun *diluvium*, meaning “deluge or flood.” Thus, originally, *antediluvian* was an adjective meaning of or relating to the period before the biblical flood.

- However, by the 1700s, *antediluvian* took on a second sense: very old-fashioned, out of date, antiquated, or primitive. You’ll probably see this second sense of *antediluvian* more often, as in: “Because of the company’s antediluvian views on social media and the Internet, it lost the opportunity to market its products to 18- to 35-year-olds.”

Absquatulate (verb)

To flee, abscond.

- According to vocabulary.com, *absquatulate* was an Americanism coined in the 1830s during a fad for creating Latin-sounding words that were playful and snappy. It might be used in a context sentence such as this: “When we returned to our campsite, we realized that the other hiker had absquatulated with most of our gear.”

- Two other words that grew out of this 19th-century fad are *bloviate*, a verb meaning "to speak pompously," and *discombobulate*, a verb meaning "to confuse, upset, or frustrate."

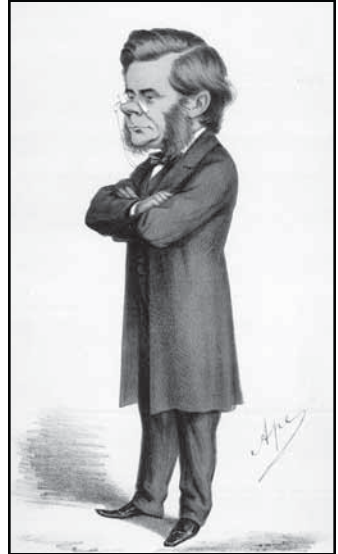
Useful Suffixes: *-ism* and *-ist*

- As we've said, a root gives us the core meaning of a word, and a prefix modifies or augments this core meaning. For example, the *lu* in *deluge* carries the central meaning of "wash." And the prefix *de-* modifies this core meaning by adding the meaning of "away." Etymologically speaking, then, a deluge washes things away.

- For their part, suffixes often determine the part of speech of a word. For example, if we add the suffix *-ize* to the adjective *civil*, we change the adjective to a verb: *civilize*, meaning "to bring out of a rude state, to enlighten, refine."

- The *-ism* in such words as *rationalism*, *empiricism*, and *materialism* is derived from the Greek suffix *-ismos*. Like its Greek source, *-ism* is a noun-forming suffix that can refer to a condition, theory, belief system, or doctrine.

- A related suffix is *-ist*, which we see in such words as *atheist*, *nihilist*, and *solipsist*. This suffix is from the Greek suffix *-istes*, which is an agent-forming suffix. It can signify "one who does or makes," such as a chemist. It can also be used to indicate "one who adheres to a certain doctrine or belief system" in such words as *capitalist*, *socialist*,



© Photos.com/Thinkstock.

The word *agnostic* was coined by the English biologist T. H. Huxley, who combined the Greek prefix *a-* with the Greek noun *gnosis*, meaning "knowledge"; an agnostic is "without knowledge" of God.

and *communist*. A capitalist, for example, is "one who believes in" capitalism.

- Two -*isms* that are commonly confused are *agnosticism* and *atheism*.
  - *Agnosticism* is a noun referring to the view that we do not know or cannot know whether or not a deity exists.

  - *Atheism*, in contrast, is a noun referring to the belief that there is no God. *Atheism* comes from the Greek prefix *a*-, meaning "not or without," and the Greek noun *theos*, meaning "god."

Nihilism (noun)

A belief in nothing.

- *Nihilism* comes from the Latin *nihil*, meaning "nothing." In philosophy, this word refers to the complete rejection of religious beliefs and moral values.

Solipsism (noun)

1. The philosophy that one has no valid reason for believing that anything exists except oneself.
2. An extreme preoccupation with one's own feelings and thoughts.

- *Solipsism* was coined in 1871 from two Latin words: *solus*, meaning "alone," and *ipse*, meaning "self." It's commonly used in reference to an extremely egocentric person.

Protean (adjective)

Able to take many forms or do many different things; versatile.

- *Protean* comes to us from Proteus, a sea god in Greek mythology who both was prescient and could change shape. He would foretell the future only to those who could catch him in his shape-shifting.

- You might hear this word in reference to a protean genius, such as Picasso, who constantly experimented and changed how he worked throughout his career.

Review Questions

1. Differentiate between the words *abdicate* and *abnegate*.

2. The teenager considered her parents' rules about dating positively __________.

3. Of course, like many teenagers, her self-centered view of the world might be summed up in the word __________.

4. What religious ritual involves washing?

5. The high winds __________ the fledging trees in the new subdivision.

6. This word brings to mind squatting or crouching down, then running away.

7. Friedrich Nietzsche is the thinker most often associated with this philosophy.

8. With her ability to sing, dance, and play characters of many ages, the actress was considered a __________ talent.

Cranky Words and Cool Words

Lecture 22

The great Mark Twain chronicled human hypocrisy and foibles with wit and sarcasm. He is known for such curmudgeonly quotes as “The more I learn about people, the more I like my dog.” Although Twain was known for his sarcasm, there was always an undercurrent of warmth and humanity in his writing. However, in our own lives, we often deal with crabby people who don’t share Twain’s tempering warmth. We also deal with people on the opposite end of the emotional spectrum—the reserved and dispassionate. In this lecture, we’ll look at a host of wonderful words to use for both these types of people—the cranky and the cool.

Splenetic (adjective)

Bad-tempered, irritable, or spiteful.

- In general, a splenetic person is full of anger. Think of the professor who’s so prickly that you’re afraid to ask a question in class for fear of receiving a sarcastic response or the boss you’ve had who flies into a rage at the slightest provocation. Put simply, splenetic people are ill-tempered cranks.

- The word *splenetic* is actually related to *spleen*, which was considered the seat of moroseness and bad temper in medieval physiology.

- English has a wide variety of synonyms for *splenetic*, including *bristly*, *prickly*, *crabby*, *cranky*, *crotchety*, *cantankerous*, *irascible* (easily provoked), *testy* (irritated by small annoyances), and *dyspeptic* (gloomy, sullen, and irritable).

Fractious (adjective)

Unruly; hard to manage; rebellious.

- We've all probably been a bit rebellious at some point in our lives, but truly fractious people seem to stir up trouble wherever they go. They can also be cranky, peevish, and irritable, but it's their disobedience or opposition to established authority that differentiates the fractious from the splenetic.

- In addition to people, *fractious* is also used to describe troublesome, difficult relationships, as in: "It took years for the son to overcome the fractious relationship he had with his father as a teenager."

- *Fractious* is close in meaning to one of our target words from an earlier lecture, *contumacious*, an adjective meaning stubbornly rebellious; willfully and obstinately disobedient.

- The root *fract* in *fractious* is derived from the verb Latin *frango*, meaning "to break." Other words with this root include *fracture* (a broken bone or a break), *fraction* (a whole broken into parts), and *infraction* (a breaking of the rules). This root also appears in a synonym for *fractious*, *refractory*, which means stubbornly disobedient or difficult to manage.

Asperity (noun)

Roughness or harshness of surface, sound, climate, condition, manner, or temper.

- *Asperity* can mean harsh and rough both literally, as in "the asperity of cruel Siberian winters," or figuratively, as in "the asperity of her manner."

- *Asperity* comes from the Latin word *asper*, meaning "rough, harsh," and was used in Latin to describe sour wine, bad weather, and hard times.

- A related word to *asperity* is *exasperate*. The prefix *ex-* usually means "out of" (*export*), but in *exasperate*, it has the connotation of "completely, thoroughly." When combined with *asper* ("harsh,

rough"), the result is a word that describes your feelings when you've been treated with complete and total harshness: annoyed and frustrated.

Importune (verb)

To harass with repeated requests; to demand of someone insistently.

© Devonyu/iStock/Thinkstock.

***Importune*—meaning "to harass or demand insistently"—is a useful word in today's world of mass-mail advertising, telemarketing, and other means of demanding more of our time and money.**

Phlegmatic (adjective)

Showing little emotion; not easily excited to action.

- *Phlegmatic* means "unemotional," which can be both a positive and a negative attribute. In the same vein, *phlegmatic* can have both positive and negative connotations.
    - In a positive sense, *phlegmatic* can mean "self-possessed, calm, composed," as in: "The phlegmatic firefighters were

completely unruffled during the harrowing rescue; their unflappable demeanor saved the day."

  - In a negative sense, phlegmatic can mean "cold, apathetic, sluggish," as in: "Her passionate plea evoked nothing but a phlegmatic shrug from her teenage son."

- Of course, *phlegmatic* brings to mind *phlegm*, but what does mucus have to do with being unemotional? In ancient and medieval medicine, phlegm was considered to be one of the four humors of the body—along with blood, black bile, and yellow bile—that needed to be in balance to sustain health. Phlegm was thought to cause apathy, and people who were cold and unemotional were said to have an imbalance of this humor—too much phlegm. From this, we get the word *phlegmatic*.

Stoic (adjective)

Seemingly indifferent to or unaffected by joy, grief, pleasure or pain.

- *Stoic* is a close synonym for *phlegmatic*, but there is a fine distinction between the two.
  - According to *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms*, *phlegmatic* "implies a temperament or constitution in which emotion is hard to arouse." Thus, *phlegmatic* carries the suggestion of inborn or natural lack of emotion.

  - *Stoic*, however, suggests restraint that has been gained through self-discipline and as a matter of principle. Stoic people have trained themselves to suppress pain and emotion. For example: "The mountain man showed a stoic indifference to hunger and cold."

- The adjective *stoic* came from Stoicism, a radical philosophy founded and taught by Zeno in Athens around 300 B.C.E. Zeno taught that happiness could be attained by the use of reason and by repressing emotion and becoming indifferent to pleasure and

pain. The word *stoicism* came from the Stoa Poikile, the "Painted Porch," a colonnaded portico in the *agora* of ancient Athens where Zeno taught.

Stolid (adjective)

Having or expressing little or no sensibility; unemotional.

- *Stolid*, like *phlegmatic* and *stoic*, carries the general meaning of being unresponsive to something that would normally excite or interest people. According to *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms*, it also "implies heavy, dull, obtuse impassivity or apathy" and suggests "impassive, mechanical, plodding, unquestioning adherence to routine."

Inure (verb)

To become accustomed to something undesirable, such as hardship, difficulty, or pain; to toughen or harden; to habituate.

- *Inure* is the perfect verb to describe how stoics are able to suppress their emotions: They train themselves to become accustomed to hardship and privation. For example: "Living in the wild for 30 years, the stoic hermit had become inured to cold and want."

Review Questions

1. The cold-hearted supervisor dispatched underperforming employees with __________.

2. Despite her __________ for a second chance, the student's __________ behavior was cause for dismissal from class.

3. Those who live in perpetual poverty may become __________ to the deprivations they suffer.

4. The cantankerous Mr. Snyder was so __________ that his neighbors were afraid to complain about the constant barking of his dogs.

5. Differentiate among *phlegmatic*, *stoic*, and *stolid*.

Words for Courage and Cowardice

Lecture 23

In this lecture, we'll explore words associated with courage and cowardice. The word *courage* itself is derived from the Latin root commonly spelled *cor* or *cord*, meaning "heart." To fight with all your heart is to fight with great courage. Richard I of England was known as Richard the Lionheart or Richard Coeur de Lion, *coeur* being the French word derived from the Latin *cor*. We'll begin the lecture with some powerful words for different kinds of courage, including false courage, cheeky courage, and reckless courage. We'll then move onto some cowardly words to use when we're not feeling quite so brave.

Intrepid (adjective)

Resolutely fearless, dauntless.

Fortitude (noun)

Mental and emotional strength in facing difficulty, adversity, danger, or temptation courageously.

- One of the most courageous figures in American history was Frederick Douglass. After escaping slavery, he became one of the great leaders in the abolitionist movement, a social reformer, a writer, and a statesman. His life epitomizes our first two target words in this lecture: *intrepid* and *fortitude*.
    - Douglass was known for his brilliant oratory and trenchant antislavery writing, including his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. In it, he describes the amazing feat of learning to read and write by himself, at a time when it was against the law to teach slaves to read. Having learned to read a few short words from his mistress when he was 12 years old, Douglass recognized the power of the written word to free

the human heart and mind, and he refused to let anything stop him from becoming literate.

- In working toward his goal, Douglass had to be both courageous and smart. He made friends with a number of poor white boys and traded food for lessons in reading. To learn how to write, Douglass was just as ingenious. In the Baltimore shipyards, he watched ship carpenters write and carefully copied the letters. Then, as he tells it:

  > After a time, when I met with any boy who I knew could write, I would tell him I could write as well as he. The next word would be, "I don't believe you, Let me see you try it." I would then make the letters which I had been so fortunate as to learn, and ask him to beat that. In this way I got a good many lessons in writing, which it is quite possible I should never have gotten in any other way.

- Douglass's quest for literacy and, later, his escape from slavery and work in the abolitionist movement exemplify the courage embodied in the words *intrepid* and *fortitude*. *Intrepid* suggests either daring in the face of danger or fortitude in enduring it. According to *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms*, *fortitude* suggests "prolonged endurance … of physical or mental hardships … without giving way under the strain."

- *Intrepid* comes from the Latin *in*, meaning "not," and *trepidus*, an adjective that means "alarmed, scared." *Trepidus* is related to the Latin verb *trepido*, meaning "tremble." Thus, to be intrepid is to not be alarmed or scared, to not tremble, even in the face of danger.

Moxie (noun)

1. The ability to face difficulty with spirit and courage.
2. Aggressive energy, vigor, verge, and pep or skill and know-how.

- We might think of *moxie* as the little brother to courage—a plucky, spunky little brother who has attitude and a fighting spirit. Those who have moxie have nerve, grit, backbone, and guts. *Moxie* can also refer to energy and vigor or skill.

- *Moxie* was originally the brand name of a nonalcoholic, bitter drink sold in the late 1800s that was advertised to "build up your nerve." Some sources indicate that *moxie* may have originally come from a New England Native American word meaning "dark water" that was later used as a name for the soft drink.

Temerity (noun)

Reckless boldness; rashness; foolhardy disregard of danger.

- Someone who has the temerity to do something is unafraid of the consequences. He or she doesn't care about possible punishment or danger, just like the student in our example who used a cell phone in class, despite the professor's warning not to.

- To remember temerity, make a personal connection. Think of a time when you've seen someone act with temerity—perhaps an upstart politician who had the temerity to challenge a powerful incumbent. Or perhaps you can think of a time when you spoke to someone in authority with temerity and later realized that you hadn't thought through the consequences of your actions before you spoke.

Chutzpah (noun)

Personal confidence or courage; shameless audacity; impudence.

- People who have chutzpah are audacious, overconfident, and so daring that they may shock others or be perceived as rude. Chutzpah is courage bordering on insolence and can have either a positive or negative connotation, depending on how it's used. The positive sense comes across in this context sentence: "Even though

she shocks and comes across to some folks as rude, I admire her chutzpah; she speaks her mind and gets things done."

- *Chutzpah* comes from a Yiddish word meaning "impudence, gall." According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, the classic definition of *chutzpah* is given by Leo Rosten: "that quality enshrined in a man who, having killed his mother and father, throws himself on the mercy of the court because he is an orphan."

- Synonyms for *chutzpah* include *audacity*, *nerve*, *impudence*, and *insolence*; related adjectives include *brazen*, *brash*, *cheeky*, and *saucy*.

Bravado (noun)

A pretentious, swaggering display of courage intended to impress others.

Braggadocio (noun)

1. A braggart.
2. Empty, arrogant boasting.

- *Bravado* refers to an outward display of bluster and false bravery used to cover up insecurity and fear. *Braggadocio* is a related word referring to someone who shows bravado.

- *Bravado* comes to us via the Middle French *bravado*, which in turn comes from the Old Italian *bravata*, meaning "bragging, boasting." Both of these words ultimately derive from the Italian *bravo*, the exclamation used at the end of a performance or show to mean "Well done!" This connection offers a convenient way to remember the meaning of *bravado*. Someone who is displaying bravado is putting on a "show" of courage.

- The word *braggadocio* comes from a name coined by Edmund Spenser in his epic poem *The Faerie Queene*. Braggadocchio

is a horse-thieving would-be knight with no honor. As Spenser describes him:

> Yet knight he was not, but a boastfull swaine,
> That deedes of armes had ever in despaire,
> Proud Braggadocchio, that in vaunting vaine
> His glory did repose, and credit did maintaine.

A Brave Root: *val*

- *Valor* is a synonym for *bravery* and means strength of character that allows one to stand up to danger without faltering. *Valor* comes ultimately from a Latin verb, *valeo*, which means "to be strong." Thus, the root *val* in an English word connotes strength or worth.

- Other words in English that contain the root *val* include *valid* (having the force or strength of law), *validate*, *invalidate*, *evaluate*, *valiant*, and *convalescent* (someone who is recovering his or her health and growing strong again).

Timorous (adjective)

Fearful or timid.

- Both *timorous* and *timid* come from the Latin verb *timeo*, meaning "to be afraid." To remember the meaning of *timorous*, highlight the first syllable, *tim*, and connect it to *timid* in your vocabulary notebook.

- A fun word for someone who is overly timid is *milquetoast*, meaning a "meek, timid person." This word comes from the name Caspar Milquetoast, a character created by newspaper cartoonist H. T. Webster in the early 20th century. A similar word is *milksop*.

Craven (adjective)

Very cowardly; abjectly afraid.

- Someone described as craven is spineless or chickenhearted. Craven politicians, for instance, are afraid to stand up for what

they believe and deserve no respect; indeed, their lack of heart inspires contempt. Use *craven* to describe cowardly people, actions, speeches, and decisions.

© Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division/ LC-USZ62-10610.

To remember *craven*, link this word to the craven ("cowardly") narrator of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven."

- A good way to remember *craven* is to link it to Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Raven." The narrator of the poem is overcome with fear by the knocking that comes at his door:

> And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
> Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
> So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating
> "'Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—
> Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—
> This it is and nothing more."

Pusillanimous (adjective)

Cowardly; lacking courage or resolution; fainthearted.

- We can put *pusillanimous* in context with a quote from Herman Melville: "Nobody is so heartily despised as a pusillanimous, lazy, good-for-nothing, land-lubber; a sailor has no bowels of compassion for him." This quote captures the connotation of shameful cowardice carried by *pusillanimous*.

- *Pusillanimous* comes from the Latin words *pusillus*, meaning "very weak, little," and *animus*, meaning "spirit, courage." Based on these root meanings, *pusillanimous* means "weak or little spirit or courage."

Review Questions

1. This word brings to mind a young boxer, swaggering and trash-talking to cover up his fear.

2. This related word refers to an even more pretentious form of false bravery—empty, arrogant boasting.

3. Successful entrepreneurs often display these two traits.

4. The company president couldn't believe that the office manager had the __________ to call him out for leaving the office early on Friday.

5. The __________ explorers Lewis and Clark were undaunted by the task of mapping the vast wilderness of America.

6. Diane's __________ actions revealed to her friends that she was spineless and disloyal.

7. The senator's __________ refusal to defend the rights of his constituents lost him the election.

8. Aiden's continuous __________ in the face of multiple setbacks was impressive.

9. Never __________, Kat boldly entered the house that her fainthearted and gullible friends believed was haunted.

Reviewing Vocabulary through Literature

Lecture 24

So far in this course, we've explored a tremendous number of rich, powerful, and beautiful vocabulary words. Just as importantly, we've delved into many high-utility affixes and roots that underlie these words—the Latin and Greek DNA that runs throughout English vocabulary. And we've used many word-learning strategies that you can add to your vocabulary toolbox. In this lecture, we will review several of the words we've learned in previous lectures by relating them to some exemplary and colorful figures from literature.

Sherlock Holmes

- Back in Lecture 1, we learned the word *procrustean* and the story of Procrustes, the son of Poseidon who had an iron bed on which he forced his hapless guests to sleep, conducting a bit of amputation for those who were too tall and stretching those who were too short. Thus, *procrustean* means "tending to produce conformity

© Stockbyte/Thinkstock.

Sherlock Holmes famously summed up his Promethean approach to solving crimes: "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

by arbitrary, ruthless, or violent means." This word relates to some of the policemen in the Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

- In these stories, Holmes repeatedly complains that the policemen he works alongside depend too much on their own expectations and prejudices, rather than using deduction and analysis to objectively solve a case. These policemen could be accused of following procedures blindly, trying to make things fit their preconceived notions.

- In *The Sign of the Four*, the second Holmes novel, one of the characters, Bartholomew Sholto, is found murdered in a locked room. The police detective, Athelney Jones, arrests all the usual suspects—the victim's brother and household staff—rather than looking at the special circumstances of the case.

- However, Holmes has a boldly original mind, one not tied down by convention or preconceived notions. Holmes uses his astute powers of observation and deduction to conclude that the usual suspects are actually innocent. In fact, Holmes deduces that Sholto was murdered by a one-legged man and a diminutive native of the Andaman Islands.

- Even Detective Jones eventually must admit that Sholto's brother and the other suspects could not have committed the murder. In short, Detective Jones's procrustean approach fails to solve the crime.

- If Jones was procrustean, Holmes himself, the boldly inventive master detective, might be described as Promethean. Given that he often comes across as a bit of a cold fish, Holmes might also be called phlegmatic; that is, he shows little emotion and is not easily incited to action.

An Ideal Husband

- In an earlier lecture, we learned the word *misanthrope*, someone who hates other people. The classic misanthrope is Alceste, the title

character of Molière's 1666 play *The Misanthrope*. Alceste truly does, as Shakespeare would have it, strut and fret his hour upon the stage, captiously critiquing his fellow characters. He's irascible and splenetic.

- Another classic misanthrope, Lord Goring, is found in the play *An Ideal Husband* by Oscar Wilde. As his butler, Phipps, helps him dress, Goring rather nicely sums up his own misanthropic attitude: "Other people are quite dreadful. The only possible society is oneself."

Supercilious (adjective)

Having a holier-than-thou attitude.

- Oscar Wilde and other gadflies are often loved for their sharp tongues. Another wag whose trenchant wisecracks brought her considerable fame was Dorothy Parker. Throughout the 1920s, Parker wrote poems, stories, and satires for such magazines as *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue*. She was even listed on the editorial board when *The New Yorker* debuted in 1925.

- Although Parker was one of the most quick-witted and funniest people who ever lived, there is definitely a certain snideness to her humor. Indeed, her acerbic remarks often reflect that holier-than-thou attitude that we identify with the adjective *supercilious*.

- Groucho Marx once said of the Algonquian Round Table, a social group to which Parker belonged, that "The price of admission is a serpent's tongue and a half-concealed stiletto." Parker herself later criticized the haughtiness of the group, writing, "The Round Table was just a lot of people telling jokes and telling each other how good they were. Just a bunch of loudmouths showing off, saving their gags for days, waiting for a chance to spring them."

The Music Man

- In the Broadway hit *The Music Man*, "Professor" Harold Hill attempts to convince the people of a town in Iowa that their sons are in desperate need of a boys' band. By exaggerating the pernicious evils of playing pool, which he says leads boys into licentious, avaricious, and salacious activities, Hill talks parents into buying expensive instruments and uniforms.

- His plan, though, is to skip town the moment the goods arrive, going back on his promise to instruct the boys on how to play. In the meantime, Hill teaches his students a factitious performance method called the Think System, in which they are simply to imagine that they know how to play. Along the way, he meets Marion the librarian, and his scam is thwarted when he falls in love.

- Of course, Professor Harold Hill is a paragon of one of the target nouns we've looked at: a mountebank.

James Joyce

- The early-20th-century Irish author James Joyce serves to illustrate the differences among three words we've already discussed: erudite, recondite, and abstruse. These words are all related, but they connote varying depths of knowledge and difficulty of comprehension.

- In 1914, Joyce published his first book, a collection of short stories called *Dubliners*, and he followed it up in 1916 with the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.
    - Each of the stories in *Dubliners* hinges on what Joyce called an "epiphany," a moment in which the main character arrives at a life-changing realization.

    - In *A Portrait of the Artist*, a semiautobiographical account of his own experiences at a Jesuit school, Joyce developed his epiphany technique further while fictionalizing his decision to abandon both Catholicism and Ireland itself.

- Even in these early works, Joyce's highly developed style reflects his erudition. His work evinces a deep knowledge of the literary tradition and his place in it. He also displays a thorough understanding of Irish society, the Catholic Church, popular music and opera, and much more.

- Joyce's 1922 masterpiece, *Ulysses*, is also erudite, but it's a more difficult read. The novel takes place on one day—June 16, 1904—and the action meanders through the city of Dublin, following a Jewish canvasser named Leopold Bloom, a 20th-century version of Homer's Odysseus.
  - The novel is famous for using a different literary style in each of its 18 chapters and for its use of stream-of-consciousness narration. This technique allows readers to follow Bloom's thoughts as he walks about town, ultimately meeting up with Stephen Dedalus, the main character from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

  - *Ulysses* contains thousands of recondite references to music, drama, poetry, and contemporary Irish politics, culture, and even street geography. Moreover, it's marked by its literary experimentation, using new forms to echo ancient ones.

  - Joyce himself said of the work: "I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that's the only way of insuring one's immortality."

- Joyce's magnum opus, *Finnegans Wake*, published in 1939, is the most difficult of all his works. In it, he virtually invents his own language. Here, for example, is the opening line: "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs." Several authors have written "keys" to *Finnegans Wake* to help readers understand its abstruse mythological and literary references.

- In sum, we might say that Joyce's early work is erudite, his middle work is recondite, and his final work is abstruse. These words delineate a spectrum of learnedness and difficulty.

The Lord of the Rings

- One of the minor characters from J. R. R. Tolkien's fantasy trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* is Grima, also known as Wormtongue. This character is the unctuous, perfidious, double-dealing chief counselor and lickspittle to King Theoden of Rohan, once a proud and noble ruler of his people. But Wormtongue's wicked counsel and false blandishments poisoned the king's mind and soul, convincing Theoden that he was a feeble old man who should stay shut up in his great hall and let others lead the kingdom.

- We learn that Wormtongue is actually a secret agent of the evil wizard Saruman. Even as he's trying to weaken King Theoden and Rohan from the inside, he's feeding his true master, Saruman, information. As a reward, he hopes to win Eowyn, the fierce and beautiful niece of King Theoden.

- At one point, in a scene in the great hall, Wormtongue is exposed for the malefactor and sycophant that he truly is. Knowing that he's trapped, he professes loyalty to King Theoden. Theoden tests Wormtongue with the ultimate choice: "To ride with me to war, and let us see in battle whether you are true; or to go now, whither you will. But then, if ever we meet again, I shall not be merciful."

- True to his nature, Wormtongue spits at the king's feet with "hissing breath" and is allowed to flee back to his master, Saruman.

All Creatures Great and Small

- *All Creatures Great and Small,* which was published in the United States in 1972, describes the life of James Herriot, a country veterinarian in the wild and beautiful Yorkshire Dales of England. The stories—heartwarming and humorous slices of life—are chock-full of colorful characters, including the brothers Siegfried

and Tristan Farnon. Siegfried is the older brother who first hires Herriot at a time when jobs for vets were scarce in England.

- Although a bit cantankerous or even mercurial at times, Siegfried proves to be a fantastic boss, supporting James, a tyro veterinarian, as he works to establish his reputation with the sometimes hard-to-please, laconic Yorkshire farmers.

- The younger brother, Tristan, is the opposite of the hard-working James. He is to be a perpetual student who never studies but eventually passes his exams, never seems to worry, and parties nearly every night, yet everything seems to work out for him in the end. He's indolent but has an incredibly facile mind, and his devil-may-care approach to life might best be described as insouciant.

Review Questions

1. This word describes someone who is overly emotional, to the point of being sickly sweet.

2. This word describes someone who is youthful and inexperienced.

3. This word describes someone who has a holier-than-thou attitude.

4. Differentiate between *didactic* and *pedantic*.

5. What is a procrustean bed?

Words for Killing and Cutting

Lecture 25

Simon Wiesenthal was an Austrian Jewish Holocaust survivor who went on to become a famous Nazi hunter and author after World War II. Wiesenthal famously said, "What connects two thousand years of genocide? Too much power in too few hands." Wiesenthal's words remind us that throughout history, too much power in the hands of a few, left unchecked, has led to unspeakable horrors. But it's important for a language to have words for such horrors so that we can name them, bring them into the light, and hopefully prevent them from happening again. Thus, this lecture focuses on words sharing the themes of killing, cutting, and ending. In addition, we will explore some important roots related to these themes.

Parricide (noun)

The murder of a parent or close relative.

- The root *cide* comes from the Latin ending -*cidium*, which itself is related to the Latin verb *caedo*, meaning both "to cut" and "to kill." English has many words containing this root, including *suicide*, *homicide*, *matricide*, *patricide*, *infanticide*, *regicide*, and the target word here, *parricide*.

- In addition to *parricide*, other words for killing within the family include *fratricide* and *sororicide*. But perhaps the ultimate human atrocity is genocide. Derived from the Greek root *genos*, meaning "race or kind," the word *genocide* was coined in 1944 by U.S. jurist Raphael Lemkin to describe the Nazi's systematic killing of Jews. The word now extends to any large-scale eradication of a particular racial, cultural, or political group, such as the mass murders in Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, Cambodia, and Sudan.

- The root *cide* is also used in many more innocuous ways, as in the words *insecticide*, *herbicide*, and *fungicide*.

- A less expected place to find this root is in the word *decide*. When you decide something, you are making a final choice, determination, or conclusion and "cutting off" other possibilities.

- The root *cide* can also be spelled *cise*. To remember this root, think of the word *scissors*, which ultimately derives from the verb *caedo*. Words with the *cise* root include *incisive*, *incisors*, *incision*, and *excise*.

Caesura (noun)

A break or pause.

- In prosody—the study of poetic meter—and in musical composition, a caesura is a small pause in the middle of a line of verse or music. The word can also be used to mean any break or interruption, as in a pause or interruption in a speech or conversation.

- *Caesura* is borrowed directly from the Latin noun *caesura*, which again, comes from the verb *caedo*, "to cut."

Vivisection (noun)

The cutting of, or operation on, a living animal, usually for scientific research.

- The Latin root spelled *seg* or *sect* also means "to cut." Key words for this root include *segment* and *section*, both of which derive from the Latin verb *seco*, "to cut." Other words with this root include *insect*, *segment*, *section*, *intersection*, *bisect*, *transect*, and *dissect*.

- The target word here, *vivisection*, is a particular type of dissection performed on living animals to enable researchers to observe the functioning of organs. The *vivi* part of the word is from the Latin adjective *vivus*, meaning "alive."

- In the past, especially during the age of early medical advances, vivisection was commonplace. These days, many scientists consider

it unnecessary or cruel, and this sense of disapproval is reflected in a second connotation of the verb *to vivisect*: experimentation that injures or kills the animal or person studied.

- You may also encounter vivisection used metaphorically, as in: "His public vivisection by the press left the commanding general with no choice but to offer his resignation." Here, the word refers to a harsh examination or criticism performed with excruciating detail.

False "Cutting" Roots

- Several words seem as if they might be derived from the *seg*/*sect* root, especially given their meanings. For example, consider *segregate*. Although this word contains the *seg* letter sequence and seems to have something to do with separating or cutting, it's not related to the *seg*/*sect* root. *Segregate* comes from the Latin roots *se*, "apart from," and *grex*, "herd."

- Similarly, *secede* and *secession* come from *se*, "apart," and *cedo*, "to go." Finally, the word *sect*, as in a religious sect, comes from the Latin word *secta*, "way, school of thought," which is derived from the verb *sequor*, "to follow." Interestingly, the word *sect* is not related to the root *sect*.

Desuetude (noun)

A state of disuse or inactivity.

- *Desuetude* fits into our lecture theme because this state marks the end of something's usefulness. Put this word to work to describe the state of something that you can't use or that is no longer active owing to neglect, deterioration, or abandonment. *Desuetude* can also refer to conceptual things, such as a custom that's no longer practiced.

- You'll often see *desuetude* used with its collocate, *fall*, to indicate that something gradually deteriorated into a state of disuse, as in: "fallen into desuetude."

© GordonImages/iStock/Thinkstock.

A beat-up jalopy that doesn't run anymore might be said to have fallen into desuetude.

- *Desuetude* comes from the Latin prefix *de*-, meaning "away from," and the Latin verb *suesco*, meaning "to become accustomed." If you neglect things for too long, you become unaccustomed to them, and eventually, they're no longer useable. They fall into desuetude through neglect.

Perdition (noun)

Loss of the soul; eternal damnation; hell; utter ruin.

- The word *perdition* is sometimes used in sermons to refer to the religious idea of the fires of hell—the place where sinners suffer eternal damnation. It is also used in the sense of "hell on earth," as in: "The governor's policies will lead our state down the road to perdition."

Extirpate (verb)

To pull up by the roots; to root out and destroy completely; to wipe out.

- *Extirpate* is often used in a figurative sense, meaning to root out and destroy, as in: "We need to extirpate the materialistic, self-centered outlook that too many people have today." You may also see *extirpate* used in reference to the extermination of animal populations, as in: "Unfortunately, the black bears were extirpated from that region by 2003."

- Extirpate originally comes from the Latin prefix *ex*-, meaning "out," and the Latin noun *stirps*, meaning "a root, stock of a tree."

Abrogate (verb)

1.	To abolish by formal, authoritative action; to annul, repeal.
2.	To treat as nonexistent; to do away with, set aside.

- *Abrogate* is commonly used with its second sense, as in such phrases as "abrogating responsibility" or "abrogating one's duty."

- Here, however, is an example of *abrogate* used in its first sense: "On August 15, 1947, India abrogated British rule, officially becoming a country independent of the British Empire." This example refers to a formal action that abolishes the status quo, and it's actually closer to the meaning of the Latin word *abrogo*, from which *abrogate* is derived. *Abrogo* means "to annul" or "to repeal." Thus, when a law is abrogated, it is officially abolished or repealed.

Two Ending Roots: *term* and *fin*

- A number of common words use the root *term*, meaning "end": *terminal*, *terminus*, *terminate*, *exterminate*, and *interminably*.

- In addition to *term*, *fin* is another Latin root that means "end." This root comes from the Latin noun *finis*, which means "boundary or end." That boundary or end can be spatial or temporal, literal or

metaphorical. Words derived from *fin* include *final*, *finale*, *finish*, *finite*, *infinite*, and *define*.

Fin de siècle (noun phrase)

End of the century.

- The phrase *fin de siècle* can be applied to the end of any century, but it is more commonly used to describe the end of the 19th century, particularly its culture of sophisticated despair and ennui. Here's an example in which the word applies to that period: "Fin de siècle Vienna became a major hub for artists of the Secession movement."

- Though we often use the French phrase, English has its own idiom, as well—*turn of the century*—though this phrase is far more generic.

Review Questions

1. The fire-and-brimstone preacher thundered that his congregation was on the road to __________ if the members weren't able to __________ sin from their lives.

2. Differentiate among regicide, patricide, and parricide.

3. The house on the corner had fallen into __________, leading neighborhood children to believe that it was haunted.

4. This word is used to refer to a break in a line of music or poetry.

5. The __________ culture of Paris has been widely romanticized.

6. By failing to deal with the issue of immigration, some believe that Congress has __________ its responsibility.

7. Today, this research practice is condemned by many as unnecessarily cruel.

A Vocabulary Grab Bag

Lecture 26

In this lecture, we'll look at some words that don't fit neatly into the themes of the other lectures but are too wonderful to be left out of the course. Because we learn vocabulary words gradually, like a dimmer switch growing brighter, we will also review a few target words from earlier lectures. Remember that each time you review a word, your knowledge of it will grow brighter, until eventually, you will make that word your own. For this reason, take a few minutes from time to time to go back and review your vocabulary notebook, refreshing yourself on just a few words to expand your overall command of the language.

Hobson's choice (noun phrase)

A choice between what is available and nothing; the absence of a real alternative.

- Cable television providers sometimes provide their customers with a modern-day Hobson's choice: Either purchase an entire sports or movie package or get no sports or movie channels at all. Such "take-it-or-leave-it" options represent a classic Hobson's choice.

- This useful phrase comes to us from Cambridge, England, in the late 1500s and early 1600s. At that time, Thomas Hobson was licensed to take parcels, letters, and passengers back and forth between Cambridge and London.
    - To do this, Hobson kept a stable of approximately 40 horses. When these horses weren't being used to carry the mail, he rented them out to Cambridge University students. But the students always chose just a few of their favorite horses, which meant that those horses became overworked.

    - In response, Hobson devised a rotation system. To ensure that each horse got the same amount of work and rest, Hobson gave

each customer the following choice: Either he took the horse nearest the door or he got no horse at all.

  - This system ensured equal rest for the horses and equal treatment for the customers. And it also gave rise to the phrase *Hobson's choice*, which spread throughout Cambridge and to other cities in England to mean "no choice at all."

- A truly intriguing example of Hobson's choice in action can be found in the ultimatum game, which has been devised by researchers in economics to explore the rationale behind individual decision making.
  - In this game, Player 1 is given $100 and asked to make a proposal for dividing the money with Player 2. Player 2 can either accept the division exactly as proposed by Player 1 or choose not to take the offer, in which case, neither player receives any money.

  - Not surprisingly, most people are willing to accept an equal division of the money, and some will accept a 60/40 or 70/30 split. But what do people do when offered a 99/1 split?

  - Anyone operating on the basis of a purely rational economic decision would take this offer because having $1.00 is better than having nothing. But many people reject an offer of 99/1, even though rejection means that they will not receive any money at all.

  - Obviously, there's a lot more at work here than simply making an economic decision. One explanation for people rejecting the 99/1 offer is that humans have a sense of inherent fairness, and if we perceive an offer as being unfair, we don't want the unfair person to profit from it, even if that means that we also get nothing.

  - The ultimatum game is an example of a Hobson's choice in action.

- Although *Hobson's choice* refers to a choice between something and nothing, it has also taken on a second sense: a choice between two equally undesirable alternatives. For example, suppose two corrupt politicians were the only two candidates running for mayor in your town. Strictly speaking, this would not be a Hobson's choice because you do have a choice, even if it's a choice between two terrible alternatives. Purists argue that this situation is more properly termed a *dilemma*.

Stultify (verb)

1. To cause to lose interest; to cause to feel dull and not alert.
2. To render useless or ineffectual.

- The word *stultify* brings to mind a hot, stuffy classroom with a monotonous lecturer. The students are sapped of all energy and left exhausted by the end of the class.

- To remember *stultify*, use the word-part connection strategy. Highlight the *stul* in *stultify* and connect it to the rhyming word *dull*. In your vocabulary notebook, write down that a dull lecture will stultify the listeners, leaving them bored and exhausted.

Frisson (noun)

An almost pleasurable sensation of fright.

- *Frisson* is the perfect word for those who like to watch horror movies or read suspenseful thrillers. It refers to a strange combination of fright and excitement. Perhaps vocabulary.com describes frisson best: a "thrilling shiver" whose "meaning lies directly between thrill and fear."

- *Frisson* came into English in the 1700s from the French word *frisson*, meaning "shiver, thrill," which came from the Latin *frigeo*, "to be cold."

Detritus (noun)

Disintegrated or eroded matter; debris.

- The primary sense of *detritus* appears in this context sentence: "The detritus of battle littered the city, with crumbled buildings and smoking hulks of vehicles everywhere." You may also encounter the word used in a figurative sense, as in: "The detritus of our failed relationship included bitterness and mistrust."

- To remember detritus, use the related-word strategy with the more familiar word *detriment*. Both *detriment* and *detritus* ultimately come from the Latin verb *detero*, meaning "to wear away." Something that is detrimental to your health, such as drinking too much, "wears away" at your health, and detritus is debris that's been "worn away."

Target Word Review

- A *sophist* is skilled in clever and devious arguments designed to persuade. Remember, sophists don't care much for the truth; they simply want to win the argument.

- *Mountebanks* are different types of tricksters; they're flamboyant charlatans who try to sell quack remedies.

- *Ersatz* refers to an inferior substitute or imitation.

- *Querulous* means complaining in an annoying way. Querulous people can also be irritating *gadflies*, who pester and nitpick.

- *Contumacious* means stubbornly disobedient and rebellious to authority.

- *Treacle* is sickly sweet writing, speech, or music.

- *Bromides* are tired clichés that have lost all meaning.

- *Mollycoddle* means to treat with excessive attention to the point of spoiling.

- *Propitiate* means to appease or try to regain the favor of.

- *Truculent* means disposed or eager to fight, belligerent.

- The *hoi polloi* are the common people, while *patricians* are aristocrats or those of higher social class.

- *Insipid* means bland and tasteless.

- *Callow* means inexperienced.

Review Questions

1. Word set: supercilious and bumptious. The man who pushes in front of you in line at the coffee shop can best be described as __________.

2. Word set: pontificating and dissembling. Someone who tells a lie is guilty of __________.

3. Word set: stultifying and fomenting. This type of speaker probably could not incite a rebellion.

4. Word set: frisson and paean. The thrill of fear you experience when reading a scary story at night is a __________.

5. Word set: detritus and lacuna. The __________ left after the party was shocking to my meticulous roommate.

6. Define a Hobson's choice.

Words for Words

Lecture 27

Words are truly the tools with which we explore and interpret every aspect of our world—physical, mental, real, and imagined. In fact, we can use words to discuss any topic we can think of, including, of course, words themselves. In this lecture and the next one, then, we will learn some words for words. In this lecture, we'll focus on more general words for words that you're likely to see in books, articles, blogs, and the news. In the next lecture, we'll explore words that refer to more specialized categories of vocabulary and language.

Shibboleth (noun)

A test word, phrase, or custom used to distinguish one group from another.

- *Shibboleth* is a transliteration of a Hebrew word that originally meant "stream" or "ear of corn." What's important about this word, however, wasn't its original meaning but its pronunciation.
    - The biblical book of Judges gives an account of a battle between the Gileadites and the Ephraimites. The Gileadites routed the Ephraimites, who tried to retreat across the Jordan River. Unfortunately for the retreating Ephraimites, the Gileadites held the ford against them. The Gileadites wanted to kill the fleeing Ephraimites, but first, they had to correctly identify them as the enemy. To do this, they conceived of a simple test.

    - According to Judges 12: 5–6: "Gilead then cut Ephraim off from the fords of the Jordan, and whenever Ephraimite fugitives said, 'Let me cross,' the men of Gilead would ask, 'Are you an Ephraimite?' If he said, 'No,' they then said, 'Very well, say 'Shibboleth.' If anyone said, 'Sibboleth,' because he could not pronounce it, then they would seize him and kill him by the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed on this occasion."

    - Because the Ephraimites could not pronounce the phoneme /sh/ in *shibboleth*, that word became the perfect test.

- According to *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, in the 1630s, *shibboleth* began to be used more figuratively in English in the sense of a watchword or slogan of a political party or class. By the mid-1800s, this meaning evolved into an "outmoded slogan still adhered to"—a sense that the word still carries today. This second sense is seen in the following context sentence: "The old-guard politicians still trot out their tired shibboleths, which don't mean much anymore."

Argot (noun)

A specialized language characteristic of a particular group of people.

- Although it is often used to refer to the vocabulary and phrases of crime and the underworld, *argot* can be used for the special vocabulary or language of any particular group, such as members of the military. In this context sentence, it refers to the language of business: "She thinks that she's impressing others by using the argot of the corporate world, such as *leveraging your employees' skill sets* and *thinking outside the box*."

- According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, *argot* entered English in 1860 from French and originally referred to "the jargon of Paris rogues and thieves."

- Other examples of argot can be found in the world of soccer (e.g., *knackered out* for "exhausted" and *draw* for a "tie") and hiking (e.g., *NOBOs* for "northbound hikers," *SOBOs* for "southbound hikers," and *slackpacking* for "hiking without a pack").

Dialect (noun)

A variety of a language often associated with a certain region or social class.

Vernacular (noun)

Form of a language spoken by the common people, as opposed to the learned and literary.

Jargon (noun)

Unintelligible or meaningless speech.

- According to *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms*, *dialect*, *vernacular*, and *jargon* "all denote a form of language or a style of speech which varies from that accepted as the literary standard."

- A dialect is a variety of a language used by a group of speakers that is often associated with a certain region or social class. Dialects differ from other varieties of the same language in vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. For example, the words *sub* and *hoagie*—used in different parts of the country for a type of sandwich—represent a dialect vocabulary difference.

- *Vernacular* refers to the everyday language used by everyday people.

- *Jargon* refers to technical or specialized language that is generally unintelligible to people outside a certain group or profession.

© mb-fotos/iStock/Thinkstock.

When Martin Luther translated the Bible into vernacular German, he made it accessible to people who couldn't understand the Latin of the Bible used by the church.

Lingua franca (noun)

A common language used by speakers of different languages to communicate.

- The phrase *lingua franca* might tempt you to think that the original lingua franca was French, but it was actually a language spoken in eastern Mediterranean ports around the time of the Renaissance. According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, this Mediterranean lingua franca was "a stripped-down Italian peppered with Spanish, French, Greek, Arabic, and Turkish words."

- Literally, *lingua franca* is an Italian phrase that means "Frankish tongue." Presumably, *franca* was used to describe this motley language because Arabic traders had a longstanding custom of calling all Europeans "*Franks*."

- Lingua francas are also referred to as *bridge languages*, that is, languages that bridge one language group with another.

Discursive (adjective)

Rambling from topic to topic, aimless, digressive.

- The word *discursive* comes from the Latin verb *discurro*, which means "to run to and fro" or "to wander." To remember this word, highlight the *cur* in *discursive* and link it to the related word *current*. A current in a river is usually meandering and rambling, just as a discursive speaker is.

Sobriquet (noun)

A nickname, usually a humorous or affectionate one.

- We're all familiar with sobriquets for famous people and places. For example:
  - The Big Apple for New York City
  - The Big Easy for New Orleans
  - The Queen of Soul for Aretha Franklin

- Satchmo for Louis Armstrong

- The Great Bambino, the Sultan of Swat, the Titan of Terror, the Colossus of Clout, and the Babe for George Herman "Babe" Ruth.

- *Sobriquet* comes from an Old French word meaning "a chuck under the chin," reminding us that sobriquets are often—but not always—jesting or humorous.

Sesquipedalian (adjective)

1. Given to the overuse of long words.

2. Long and ponderous, polysyllabic.

- All of the following words can be described as sesquipedalian:
  - Electroencephalograph
  - Deinstitutionalization
  - Pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis (a lung disease)
  - Antidisestablishmentarianism.

- According to John Ayto's *Dictionary of Word Origins*, *sesquipedalian* as an English word was inspired by Horace, the Roman poet. Horace criticized the pretentious use of long, pompous-sounding words, using the phrase *sesquipedalia verba*, which literally means "words a foot and a half long."

- *Sesquipedalian* comes from the Latin *sesqui*- ("half as much again") and *ped* ("foot"). The prefix *sesqui*- is also found in *sesquicentennial*, a 150-year anniversary or celebration.

Somniloquy (noun)

Sleep talking.

- *Somniloquy* is an easy word to remember if we break it down by its morphemes: *somni* and *loq*. The root *somni* is from the Latin word *somnus*, which means “sleep.” The same root is found in *insomnia*, the inability to sleep. The root *loc* or *loq* comes from the Latin verb *loquor*, which means “to speak.” We saw this same root in the target word *obloquy* from an earlier lecture, meaning critical speech or verbal abuse.

Review Questions

1. After completing this course, your friends might characterize your speech as __________.

2. Early linguistic studies of slang often concentrated on the __________ of the criminal world in Britain.

3. The language of texting and the Internet seems to have become the __________ of young people today.

4. The professor’s __________ style of teaching, in which he engaged in rambling discourses on unrelated topics, did nothing to help his students understand his political history course.

5. The nickname Honest Abe is an example of one of these.

6. The nearly incomprehensible __________ of the computer engineers discourages most people in the company from even asking questions about software or hardware.

7. What’s the difference between the vernacular and a dialect?

8. The slogan “Yes We Can” from President Obama’s 2008 campaign might be described as a __________ of the Democratic Party.

9. This word shares a Latin root with *insomnia*.

Specialty Words for Language

Lecture 28

Over the years, linguists and language scholars have organized and categorized words in a number of different ways. In this lecture, we'll discuss many of these linguistic categories or specialty words, such as blended words, clipped words, spoonerisms, and more.

Spoonerism (noun)

The transposition of the (usually) initial sounds of two or more words, often creating a humorous effect.

- Spoonerisms are often slips of the tongue, or speech errors, but are sometimes made intentionally for comedy's sake. For example, one might mistakenly say, "Go and shake a tower" instead of the intended "Go and take a shower" or "a well-boiled icicle" instead of "a well-oiled bicycle."

- These two examples were actually attributed to the man *spoonerism* was named for, the Reverend William Archibald Spooner. He was an Anglican clergyman and warden of New College Oxford in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He was a well-respected, kindly man but is known in history for his humorous slips of the tongue.

- Although Spooner undoubtedly had a tendency toward muddled speech, many spoonerisms attributed to him are apocryphal. Legitimately or not, here are some other well-known spoonerisms attributed to Spooner himself:
    - "The Lord is a shoving leopard" instead of "The Lord is a loving shepherd."

    - "It is kisstomary to cuss the bride" instead of "It is customary to kiss the bride."

- “Let us glaze our rasses to the queer old dean” instead of “Let us raise our glasses to the dear old queen.”

- “Is the bean dizzy?” instead of “Is the dean busy?”

- “He was killed by a blushing crow” instead of “He was killed by a crushing blow.”

- We all have these slips of the tongue from time to time, but as David Crystal notes in the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*, the interesting thing about spoonerisms is that they are predictable, not random.
  - For example, one predictable pattern of spoonerisms is that the two words that contain the slip of the tongue, such as *blushing crow* for *crushing blow*, are usually found within the same syntactic or rhythm unit—often right next to each other. Thus, we’re more likely to swap sounds in two words that are in the same phrase, not words found far apart.

  - In this way, spoonerisms give us some insight into how our minds plan out our speech. We plan our speech in phrasal units, and these phrases correspond to units of thought.

  - When we try to pronounce the spoken words that represent these units of thought, we sometimes put them down in the wrong places, mixing up words and sounds within the words.

Homophone (noun)

One of two or more words that sound the same but are spelled differently and have different meanings.

- The Greek root *homo* in *homophone* means “same,” and the root *phon* means “sound,” as in *phonics* or *telephone*. Thus, homophones are “same-sounding” words.

- A few common homophone pairs include the following: *blue*/*blew*, *faint*/*feint*, *haul*/*hall*, *patience*/*patients*, and *kernel*/*colonel*.

Homograph (noun)

One of two or more words that are spelled the same but have different pronunciations and meanings.

- *Bass* is a common homograph that refers to both a fish and a large stringed instrument. Other homographs include *bow* ("a stringed weapon" and "to bend in respect") and *minute* ("a 60-second unit of time" and "very small").

Homonym (noun)

One of two or more words that are spelled and pronounced the same but carry different meanings.

- An easy way to remember homonyms is that they have characteristics of both homographs and homophones.

- An example of a homonym pair is *bear*/*bear*. Both words are spelled and pronounced the same, but one refers to an animal, and the other means "to endure." Because homonyms are spelled the same and sound the same, the only way to know which word a writer or speaker intends is from the context.

- You can remember the word *homonym* from its word elements. Again, *homo* means "same," and *oynm* is from the Greek word *onuma*, meaning "name." Thus, homonyms are words that have the same "name"—the same spelling and sound—even though they have different meanings.

- Why does English have word pairs that are spelled the same and sound the same but mean different things? It's often the case that homonyms are actually two different words, derived from two

different sources, and just happen to have evolved into the same spelling and pronunciation.

- In an earlier lecture, we encountered a specific category of homonyms—Janus words, or contronyms; as you recall, these are homonym pairs in which one word is the antonym for the other. Our earlier target word was *cleave*, which can mean both "to split or divide by cutting" or "to cling closely to."
    - *Sanction* is another Janus word, which can mean both "to permit to do something" and "to punish or penalize." For example, someone can be sanctioned to do something, as in: "The town sanctioned the use of motor scooters on sidewalks." Or *sanction* can carry the meaning of a penalty or punishment, as in: "The United States imposed economic sanctions against Russia."

    - Even the simple word *dust* is a Janus word. This word can mean both "to remove dust," as in "dusting the house," or "to add dust," as in "dusting a cake with sugar."

Eponym (noun)

A word derived from a person's name.

- In our earlier lecture on eponyms, we saw that the word *draconian* came from the harsh Greek lawgiver Draco and *quixotic* came from the romantically idealistic Don Quixote.

- The word *eponym* seems to be undergoing a change in meaning. Originally, *eponym* was defined as one whose name is or is thought to be the source of a word.
    - As you recall, *bowdlerize* means to change a text by modifying or deleting parts that might be considered vulgar. It came from the name of Thomas Bowdler, a physician who published a sanitized version of Shakespeare's works. Under the original definition of *eponym*, Bowdler—the source—would be considered the eponym for the derived word *bowdlerize*.

 - However, language users today are more likely to flip this definition, using *eponym* to mean the word or name derived from a proper noun. Using this definition, *bowdlerize* is the eponym, derived from the name *Bowdler*.

- Another interesting eponym is *boycott*, which means to abstain from buying or using something. The source of this word was Charles Boycott, the land manager for an absentee landlord in County Mayo, Ireland. Boycott refused to lower rents to Irish tenant farmers in 1880, which was a poor year for harvests. In response, the locals organized a campaign to shun Boycott: Workers refused to harvest his crops, businessmen would not trade with him, and even the local postman would not deliver his mail. This type of protest and the word itself quickly spread across Europe and even into non-European languages.

- The word *guillotine* is also an eponym. Of course, a guillotine is a device for decapitating criminals, but believe it or not, guillotines were actually developed as a more humane way of executing people. The word comes from the name of Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, a French physician who proposed that a machine might deliver a quicker and less messy death than an executioner with a broadax.

- *Grundyism* is an eponym that means a prudish adherence to conventionality, especially in personal behavior, or a display of excessive modesty. The word comes from Mrs. Grundy, an unseen character in a play written by Thomas Morton called *Speed the Plough*. The character was known for her extreme prudishness, particularly in matters of sexual morality.

Toponym (noun)

1. A place-name.
2. A word named after a place.

- We've already encountered a few toponyms in our lectures, including *billingsgate*. As you recall, this word came from the

market at Billingsgate in London, where the female fishmongers spewed forth harsh but creative profanity.

- Another toponym with an interesting history is *tuxedo*. This word originally came from a Native American Delaware word meaning "wolf."
    - The word was anglicized and given to the name of Tuxedo village in southeastern New York. Tuxedo Park, an area on Tuxedo Lake and near the village of Tuxedo, developed into a fashionable resort in the 1880s.

    - By the turn of the century, a few of the young men in the area became disenchanted with the current style of formal dress that was in fashion and started a new trend: wearing dress jackets without tails. Thus, the tuxedo was born.

- It's interesting to note that you could eat an entire meal consisting solely of culinary toponyms. For the main meal, you'd have your choice of frankfurters or hamburgers (Frankfurt and Hamburg, Germany). For condiments, you could choose Worcestershire sauce (Worcestershire, England) or Dijon mustard (Dijon, France). And for a side dish, you might have Boston baked beans. You could wash the meal down with any number of beverage toponyms, such as Bordeaux wine, a Manhattan, a Long Island Iced Tea, or a Singapore Sling.

Acronym (noun)

A word or abbreviation formed from the initial letters of each of the successive or major parts of a compound term.

- Acronyms are created by taking the initial letters of a set of words and combining them into a single word or phrase. *Acro* comes from the Greek word *akros*, which can mean "topmost or highest" but can also refer to the "tip" of something. You can think of an acronym as consisting of the "tips" of several words.

© Jupiterimages/liquidlibrary/Thinkstock.

The military is known for its penchant for acronyms, including the colorful *SNAFU* ("situation normal, all fouled up") and *FUBAR* ("fouled up beyond all recognition").

- The acronyms *USA*, *FBI*, and *CIA* are pronounced as a series of initial letters rather than as a whole word; for this reason, some linguists classify them as *initialisms*. But for our purposes, we'll consider the two categories together.

- We often think of acronyms as a recent phenomenon because the term *acronym* came into English in the 1940s, and there has been a dramatic increase in acronym usage in the 20th century. However, acronyms are not a modern invention. For example, the legions of ancient Rome carried standards on which the acronym *SPQR* was emblazoned. This acronym stood for the Latin phrase *Senatus Populusque Romanus*, meaning "the Senate and the People of Rome." It was a way of referring to the government of the Roman Republic and, later, the Roman Empire.

- In the following acronyms, the initial letters of a set of words make up a new word that is pronounced as a whole word:
    - RADAR: radio detection and ranging

    - SCUBA: self-contained underwater breathing apparatus

    - LASER: light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation

Portmanteau word (noun)

A new word that is blended together from parts of existing words.

- Relatively recent examples of portmanteau words include the following:
    - Infomercial = information + commercial

    - Netiquette = Internet + etiquette

    - Chortle = chuckle + snort

- The term *portmanteau word* comes from the sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, in which Humpty Dumpty explains to Alice the unusual terms in the nonsense poem "Jabberwocky." Humpty says, "You see it's like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word." A *portmanteau* is a suitcase or bag with two compartments that can be folded together.

- Other portmanteau words include:
    - Motel = motor + hotel

    - Brunch = breakfast + lunch

    - Spork = spoon + fork

    - Turducken = turkey + duck + chicken

    - Stagflation = stagnation + inflation

- Microsoft = microcomputer + software
- Amtrak = American + track

Clipped word (noun)

A word that has been shortened with no change in meaning.

- In addition to acronyms and portmanteau words, clipped words are another way to say more with less in English. Common clipped words include the following:
  - Gym = gymnasium
  - Exam = examination
  - Lab = laboratory
  - Roach = cockroach
  - Net = Internet
  - Flu = influenza
  - Fridge = refrigerator
- The word *canter*, referring to a horse's easy gallop, is also a clipped word. According to the *Dictionary of Word Origins*, this word is derived from the phrase *Canterbury trot or gallop*, referring to the pace at which pilgrims in the Middle Ages rode to the shrine of Saint Thomas À Becket at Canterbury Cathedral.

Review Questions

1. Distinguish among homophones, homographs, and homonyms.

2. Distinguish between toponyms and eponyms.

3. English speakers seem to have a propensity for saying more with less; this tendency is apparent in our fondness for __________ and __________.

4. The phrase *rental deceptionist* for *dental receptionist* is an example of this.

5. The language of the military is notorious for being replete with __________, such as POTUS.

Nasty Words and Nice Words

Lecture 29

We all know that the word *nasty* means "offensive, vicious," and *nice* means "pleasing, agreeable." It's interesting to note, however, that *nice* hasn't always been so nice. *Nice* comes from the Latin *nescius*, which meant "ignorant, unaware." English borrowed the word from Old French in the late 13th century, when it meant "foolish, stupid, senseless." It took on many other meanings over the years, including "wanton, lascivious," "coy," and "precise." It wasn't until the 18th century that *nice* began to be used in the modern sense of "agreeable." Since then, *nice* has proved so useful that if anything, it is now overused. In this lecture, then, we'll discover some other words to use instead of *nasty* or *nice*.

Virulent (adjective)

1. Extremely infectious, malignant, poisonous, or deadly.
2. Bitterly hostile, antagonistic, or spiteful; hateful.

- In October of 1347, the townspeople in the Sicilian port of Messina went to the docks to greet 12 trading ships. Sadly, they were in for a terrible surprise that would forever change the course of history. What they found sounds like a scene from a modern-day horror movie: Nearly all the sailors aboard the ships were dead, and the few who were alive were in terrible pain, riddled with fever, and vomiting.

- Perhaps most horrifying were the strange black boils oozing pus and blood that covered the sailors and eventually gave rise to the name of the disease from which they were suffering: the Black Death. Some historians estimate that one-third of Europe's population—20 million people—died from the Black Death in the five years following the introduction of the disease in Sicily in 1347.

- The Black Death is a perfectly horrifying example of the word *virulent*. This word has a literal meaning of "extremely infectious or deadly," as in a "virulent disease." It also has a more figurative meaning—"bitterly hostile," as in a "virulent personal attack."

- *Virulent* is related to the English word *virus* and comes from the Latin word *virus*, meaning "poison." Synonyms and related words include *pernicious*, *acerbic*, *caustic*, *acrimonious*, and *vitriolic*.

Pernicious (adjective)

Exceedingly harmful or destructive; deadly.

Mordant (adjective)

Bitingly sarcastic.

- Like *trenchant*, *mordant* can imply a sharp wit, but it is used to emphasize the biting, sarcastic nature of the language. Someone who is mordant has the ability to drive home disagreeable truths in a sardonic, caustic manner. *Mordant* comments imply insensitiveness or even outright maliciousness in intent. Thus, *mordant* is a bit nastier than *trenchant*.

- Synonyms and closely related words for *mordant* include *caustic*, *acrid*, and *scathing*.
  - *Caustic* is a close synonym for mordant.

  - Use *acrid* when you want to stress bitterness or even malevolence.

  - *Scathing* often implies righteous indignation and can describe a withering criticism or a fierce raking over the coals. For example, you might see a "scathing expose" of a politician's corrupt administration by an investigative reporter on the news. In other words, *scathing criticism*, although fierce, can come from a good motive. In contrast, *mordant criticism* often implies ill intent.

- Not surprisingly, *mordant* comes from a Middle French word that meant, literally, "biting." The Middle French word, in turn, originally came from the Latin *mordeo*, meaning "to bite, bite into; nip; sting." *Mordant* is also related to the English word *morsel*, meaning "a small bite of something."
  - *Remorse*, "a deep regret for a past wrongdoing," is another word that comes from the same Latin origin. The prefix *re*- can mean "back," and the root *mor* means "to bite"; thus, a feeling of remorse is literally a feeling that something you did in the past has come "back to bite" you.

  - Don't confuse the Latin root commonly spelled *mord* or *mor* and meaning "to bite" with the Latin root *mort*, which means "death." The words *mordant*, *morsel*, and *remorse* are all connected, but they have no etymological relationship with such *mort* words as *mortuary*, *immortal*, and *mortality*.

Piquant (adjective)

1. Agreeably pungent or sharp in taste or flavor; pleasantly biting or tart; spicy.
2. Agreeably stimulating and engagingly provocative.
3. Interesting, charming, attractive.

- *Piquant* can relate to flavor or taste, as in the sour taste of a lemon, or to something that is agreeably stimulating and engagingly provocative, as in "The editorial's piquant commentary sparked a lively debate among the coffee house regulars." *Piquant* can also mean "interesting, charming, or attractive," as in "her piquant wit." Antonyms for *piquant* include *bland*, *tasteless*, and *insipid*.

- *Piquant* comes from the French word *piquer*, meaning "to prick or sting," and is related to the English word *pike*, a long, spear-like weapon. To remember the biting, stinging aspect of *piquant*, you might connect it to *pike* in your mind. You might also think of a

concrete personal connection to *piquant*, such as your friend's spicy homemade salsa, or a figurative connection, such as the "piquant conversation"—provocative, engaging—that takes place in your book club.

- Both *piquant* and *pique* share the same French ancestor word meaning "to prick or sting." Thus, it's no surprise that *pique* as a verb means "to irritate or to provoke." You might also hear the phrase "It piqued my interest," meaning that something aroused or stimulated your curiosity.

Officious (adjective)

Marked by excessive, often aggressive eagerness in offering unwanted advice, service, or help to others; meddlesome.

- Both *officious* and *office* come from the Latin *officium*, meaning "duty, service." According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, when *officious* originally came into English in the 1560s, it carried the positive meaning of "zealous, eager to serve." However, by 1600, *officious* had taken on its current negative connotation of "overzealous and meddlesome."

- We've all probably encountered someone who could be described as *officious*—the busybody who always offers unwanted advice. To remember this word, keep in mind the connection to *office* and the -*ous* suffix, which means "full of." People who are officious could be "full of" their jobs at the office. You might also make a personal connection to the word; think of someone you know who tries to be so helpful that he or she crosses the line to become annoying and pushy.

Salubrious (adjective)

Conducive or favorable to health or well-being; wholesome.

Salutary (adjective)

Producing a beneficial effect; remedial.

- Both *salubrious* and *salutary* can describe something that's good for your health, but *salutary* can also describe something that's beneficial in a more general sense. According to *The Artful Nuance* by Rod L. Evans, "What is salutary promotes an improvement, especially an educational, a psychological, or a moral one." In this sense, you'll often hear *salutary* used along with *effect*, as in "Research has proven that unstructured play has a salutary effect on children's social and emotional development."

- The *salu* morpheme is found in several Latin words related to health and welfare, including *salubrious* and *salutary*, as well as *salute* and *salutation*. When you greet someone with a salutation, you generally ask about that person's health. When the ancient Romans greeted one another, they typically said, "*Salve*!" which literally means "Be well!" In French, a more informal greeting is "*Salut*!"

© Horsche/iStock/Thinkstock.

In Irish, a common toast is "*Slainte*," meaning "health"; this word is distantly related to the Latin *salus*, which also means "health."

Avuncular (adjective)

1. Of or having to do with an uncle.
2. Resembling an uncle; friendly; helpful; kind, patient, and indulgent.

- *Avuncular* is often used not in the strict "uncle" sense but in the more general "patient and kind" sense, as in such phrases as *avuncular charm* or *avuncular indulgence*.

- *Avuncular* comes from the Latin *avunculus*, which means "maternal uncle" and is the ultimate source of the English word *uncle*. To remember *avuncular*, highlight the *unc* part of the word and link it to your favorite uncle.

Review Questions

1. Distinguish between the words *salubrious* and *salutary*.

2. Sheila bustled about in an __________ manner, meddling in the work of everyone in her department.

3. Unlike Sheila, Walter was an __________ coworker, always willing to help out when needed but never offering unwanted advice.

4. This word is a slightly nastier synonym for *trenchant*.

5. The __________ fumes caused watery eyes, coughing, and headaches among the lab technicians.

6. Both the conversation and the wine at the party were delightfully __________.

7. Hillary's __________ rumors worked their magic; by the end of the week, no one in the group would even speak to Maureen.

Words for the Really Big and the Very Small

Lecture 30

This lecture focuses on words associated with the large and the small, both literally and figuratively. In the course of the lecture, we will answer the following large and small questions: (1) Is *ginormous* really a word in the dictionary, and if so, should you use it? (2) Should really big things be described as capacious or commodious, and what's the difference between these two close synonyms? (3) What are the two words for big and small given to English by the classic satire written by Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*?

Exiguous (adjective)

Excessively scanty, inadequate, and meager.

- Use *exiguous* to emphasize a smallness that is undesirable or is less than the normal amount or size of something, as in: "Starting with exiguous financial resources, she stunned everyone and made a fortune in the stock market, becoming known as a wizard of Wall Street." Synonyms for *exiguous* include *inadequate*, *hand-to-mouth*, *scant*, *scarce*, *skimpy*, *spare*, and *sparse*.

- We often see *exiguous* used with one of several collocates: *resources*, *supplies*, *finances*, or *evidence*.

- To remember *exiguous*, connect it to *exact*, a related word that comes from the same Latin origin. In your vocabulary notebook, highlight the *ex*- and write down that when you have less than the exact amount of something you need, you have an exiguous amount.

Diminuendo (noun)

A decrease in loudness or intensity.

© Devonyu/iStock/Thinkstock.

The Egyptian astronomer Ptolemy gave us the terms *minute* (*pars minuta prima*, "the first small part," or 1/60th of a circle) and *second* (*pars minuta secunda*, "the second small part," 1/60th of a minute).

- The etymology of *diminuendo* can help you remember its meaning. *Diminuire* is an Italian verb meaning "to diminish," and *-endo* is basically the Italian version of the *-ing* we use in English as a suffix for gerunds and participles. Highlight the *dimini* in *diminuendo* and connect it to the related word *diminish* in your vocabulary notebook. Write down that a *diminuendo* refers to a diminishing loudness or intensity.

- The *min* morpheme in *diminuendo* is a Latin root meaning "small." It appears in such words as *miniscule*, *mince*, *minor*, *minimum*, *minus*, *minute*, *diminish*, and *diminutive*.

Lilliputian (adjective)

1. Very small, diminutive.

2. Trivial, petty.

- In 1726, Jonathan Swift published his classic biting satire, *Gulliver's Travels*. The central character in this book is Lemuel Gulliver, an English surgeon who takes to traveling the seas because his business is failing.
    - Soon after setting out, Gulliver is shipwrecked. When he awakens, he finds himself tied up by a race of tiny people, the Lilliputians. The Lilliputians are a small people who talk big. Swift, with great skill, ironically contrasts this puny race with their pretentious, vainglorious boasting and bombast.
    - Eventually, the Lilliputians take Gulliver to their emperor. As the story unfolds, we discover that the Lilliputians engage in a great deal of backbiting and machinations: These physically small people are also figuratively small; they're petty and argue over trivial, ridiculous issues. In the Lilliputians, Swift was satirizing what he saw as petty religious quarrels over trivial doctrinal issues of his time.
    - The Lilliputians eventually convince Gulliver to help them fight against their enemies, the people of Blefescu, and he uses his great size to win a battle over their navy. However, Gulliver's fortunes turn when a fire breaks out in the royal palace of Lilliput. He puts the fire out by urinating on it, and for this act, he is condemned to death by being shot in the eyes and starved to death. Luckily, Gulliver escapes and makes his way back to England.
- Of course, this story gives us the target word *Lilliputian*, which can mean either "very small" or "trivial." The word took off immediately after the publication of *Gulliver's Travels*, demonstrating the book's influence.

Brobdingnagian (adjective)

Immense, enormous.

- You might think that after nearly getting executed, Gulliver would stay at home, but he decides to take to the seas again. This time, he ends up in the land of the giants called the Brobdingnag.
    - A Brobdingnag farmer finds Gulliver and exploits him by charging other giants to see this tiny exotic creature. Eventually, the farmer sells Gulliver to the queen of Brobdingnag, who takes a fancy to him.

    - At court, Gulliver sees the ordinary flaws of the giants magnified many times over because of their great size, and he becomes repulsed by them. Here, Swift is demonstrating that the human race, even humans who might appear perfect at first glance, will show foibles and flaws upon closer examination.

- This episode brings us the word *Brobdingnagian*, meaning "enormous." Consider the word in context: "The billionaire's Brobdingnagian sculptures towered over us as we approached the front door of her mansion."

Magnum opus (noun)

An artist's greatest work.

- *Magnum opus* is Latin for "great work," but it is typically used in reference to an artist's greatest work, such as Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling or James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The word *opus* is often used for composers' works, as in: "The 'Moonlight Sonata' is actually Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp minor, opus 27, number 2." The plural of *magnum opus* is *magna opera*.

- The Latin root *magn* means "great, large." This root appears in *magnificent*, *magnate*, *Magna Carta*, *magnum*, *magnanimous*, *Albertus Magnus* (Albert the Great, a sainted doctor of the Catholic Church), and *Charlemagne* (Charles the Great).

- Greek has its own root meaning "great, large": *mega*, which comes from the Greek word *megas*. Words containing this root include

megalopolis, *megabyte* (1 million bytes of information storage in a computer), *megacycles*, and *megohms*.

- Colloquially, *mega* is often tacked onto the front of words to convey the meaning "very large." For example, if you just won the lottery, you might say that you're rolling in megabucks!

Commodious (adjective)

Comfortably or conveniently spacious; roomy.

- Both *commodious* and *commode* originally came from the same Latin word, *commodus*, which meant "proper, fit, appropriate, convenient."

- *Commodious* first appeared in English in the early 15th century, meaning "convenient," but it wasn't until the 16th century that it began carrying the current meaning of "roomy and spacious."

- The original Latin *commodus* passed into French as *commode*, meaning "convenient, suitable," and was used to refer to both a tall headdress for a woman and a chest of drawers. In the 18th century, English borrowed this French word for a chest of drawers. It wasn't until 1851 that *commode* started to be used for a chair housing a chamber pot.

Capacious (adjective)

Capable of containing a great deal; spacious and roomy.

- Like *commodious*, *capacious* means spacious and roomy, but according to *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms*, *capacious* stresses the ability to hold more than the ordinary container can hold.

- *Capacious* comes from the same Latin origin as *capable*. In your vocabulary notebook, highlight the *capa* in *capacious* and connect

it to *capable*: “Something that is capacious is capable of holding a lot; it’s spacious.”

Juggernaut (noun)

An overwhelming or unstoppable force that smashes everything in its path.

- *Juggernaut* is a Hobson-Jobson of *Jagannath*, the name of one of the incarnations of the Hindu god Krishna. In Sanskrit, *jagat* means “world or universe,” and *natha* means “lord.” Thus, Jagannath is the lord of the world.

- The English word *juggernaut* dates back to the 1630s and originally referred to the huge wagons that devotees would pull through the streets during the Rath Yatra, an annual chariot procession in the town of Puri in India. An early European account of the festival claimed that Hindus threw themselves beneath the wheels of the wagons. Though this is unlikely, it led to the word’s two meanings in English: the older sense of “something that demands blind devotion or sacrifice” and the more common, modern sense of “an unstoppable force.”

- The term *Hobson-Jobson* refers to the law of Hobson-Jobson, which states that loanwords are always phonetically adapted to suit the phonology of the language borrowing them. Both the principle and the term come from a book called *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*, published in 1886. In short, Brits had difficulty pronouncing *Jagannath*; thus, when they borrowed the name to use metaphorically, it morphed into the more English-friendly *juggernaut*.

Review Questions

1. What two words, respectively meaning “large” and “small,” were given to English by Jonathan Swift?

2. Over the course of his career, the artist's work showed a __________ in the use of color.

3. His __________, which was hailed by critics and admired by the public, was a very pale canvas entitled simply *Desert*.

4. Synonyms for this word include *scanty*, *sparse*, and *inadequate*.

5. The candidate's forceful campaign was a __________, rolling over his opponents' less intensive efforts.

6. Rhochelle's large new apartment featured a __________ guest room and __________ storage for her sports equipment.

Spelling as a Vocabulary Tool

Lecture 31

Throughout this course, we've been tapping into the spelling-meaning connection, specifically focusing on high-utility Latin and Greek affixes and roots to help us learn vocabulary. But to get the most out of the spelling-meaning connection, it's helpful to understand the three layers of information in the English spelling system that we'll explore in this lecture: alphabet, pattern, and meaning. When you see how all three layers work together, you'll have a better appreciation for the vocabulary we've been learning.

Spelling Patterns

- Even though you may not be consciously aware of it, you already know many spelling patterns in English.
  - For example, with a two-syllable word in which the vowel in the first syllable is short, the following consonant is often doubled. This pattern appears in such words as *better*, *rabbit*, and *sudden*.

  - With a two-syllable word in which the vowel in the first syllable is long, the following consonant is usually not doubled. This pattern appears in such words as *pilot* and *vacant*.

- These "to double or not to double" patterns with short and long vowels are two high-utility patterns contained in a host of English words. In fact, English has scores of similar spelling patterns, which means that the language has a much more regular spelling system than most people think.

Alphabetic Layer

- The first layer in our spelling system is the alphabet layer. Most kindergarten and first-grade children are exploring this first layer as they learn to read and write. A child learning the alphabetic layer

© monkeybusinessimages/iStock/Thinkstock.

Children in the alphabetic layer of development are learning to sound out and spell one-syllable, short-vowel words, such as *mat*.

believes that every letter makes a sound and that we read and spell words in a left-to-right, linear fashion.

- Children at this developmental stage also tend to be letter-name spellers; that is, they believe that the names of the letters tell their sounds. For example, a child at this stage might spell the word *wise* as *y-i-z*. This strategy works well for many letters in the English alphabet, such as *b*, but not all of them.

- As long as children have been writing, they have been "inventing" spellings, but in the early 1970s, research by Carol Chomsky and Charles Read provided the linguistic key that unlocked the systematic logic behind young children's invented spellings.
    - At roughly the same time, Edmund Henderson and his colleagues at the University of Virginia were also looking for patterns and logic in children's spellings across a range of ages

and grade levels. Read's findings enabled Henderson and his colleagues to interpret these spellings.

  - Henderson and his colleagues then extended Read's work. The Virginia spelling studies resulted in a comprehensive model of developmental word knowledge—of how our knowledge of words develops over time from young children to adults through three layers: from sound or alphabet, to pattern, to meaning.

- One interesting insight growing out of this work was the fact that the spelling development of children over time mirrors the historical development of English spelling over time.
  - For example, Henderson referred to beginning spellers as "little Saxons," because of the similarities between the way young children spell and how the Anglo-Saxons spelled and wrote in Old English.

  - In fact, the alphabetic layer in English was established during the Old English period. As the authors of the book *Words Their Way* put it, "[Old English was] remarkably consistent in letter-sound correspondence and used the alphabet to systematically represent speech sounds." That is quite similar to the way young children spell and read: one letter for each sound they hear.

  - And this insight makes sense. The oldest words in English are the short, high-frequency Anglo-Saxon words, such as *sun*, *moon*, and *day*. These Anglo-Saxon words are the same high-frequency words that children learn to read and spell in the primary grades.

- Here's what we know, then, about the alphabetic layer of English spelling:
  - First, children in the alphabetic layer have a tacit logic underlying their spelling; their spelling makes linguistic sense.

- Second, children at this stage operate under the principle that every letter makes a sound and that we read and spell in left-to-right, linear fashion.

- Third, children in this stage have the same basic spelling logic as the Anglo-Saxons.

Pattern Layer

- Many critics of the English spelling system would have us stop at the alphabetic layer. They believe that we should just spell words "the way they sound"—that a system based on a one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds would be much better.
    - What if we spelled *hate* the way it sounds, with one letter for each sound? We couldn't use the silent *e* because every letter must make a sound. That would leave us with *h-a-t*, but we already have a word spelled that way. This example shows us why the alphabetic layer alone isn't enough.

    - A long-vowel word, such as *hate*, is a perfect example of how the next layer of spelling information comes into play: the pattern layer.

- Notice a few things about the word *hate* that are different from the alphabetic later.
    - First, not every letter makes a sound; the *e* is silent.

    - Second, this silent *e* is present for a good reason: It makes the preceding vowel long, in this case, *a*. This is an important concept in English orthography: We usually mark long vowel sounds with a silent letter.

    - Finally, we can't read the word *hate* one letter at a time because when we get to the silent *e*, we would have to go back to make the *a* long. In other words, we have to process the *-ate* ending in *hate* as a single pattern or chunk. And this is where the pattern layer comes in. When children reach this stage of

development, they start processing whole chunks of common letter sequences, or patterns, together.

- Children at the pattern stage of development realize a few things they did not know in the alphabet stage:
    - First, every letter does not make a sound in English; there are some silent letters.

    - Second, these silent letters provide important information, such as marking another vowel as long.

    - Third, the "one letter at a time" strategy won't work for all words. Thus, children at this stage learn to read letters in frequently occurring patterns, processing entire parts of words simultaneously.

- To get the idea of the type of patterns we learn in this layer of spelling, consider the words *peach* and *patch*. With long vowel sounds in such words, as in *peach*, the /ch/ sound at the end is usually spelled *c-h*. With short vowel sounds, as in *patch*, the /ch/ sound at the end is usually spelled *t-c-h*. Most adults don't consciously realize this pattern, but it, too, demonstrates the regularity of English spelling.

- If Anglo-Saxon Old English was responsible for the alphabetic layer in English, the patterns came from the period of the Norman Conquest (1066), which led to a massive influx of French words in English. This, in turn, led to a host of new vowel sounds represented by new vowel patterns entering English with the new words.
    - As we said, children at this pattern stage spell eerily like "little Anglo-Normans." For example, a child at this stage might spell the word *sweet* as *s-w-e-t-e*, the same way Chaucer spelled *sweet* in the 1300s.

    - What's interesting here is not that this child's spelling is "wrong" but that it demonstrates what the child knows. In this case, the child knows the pattern of marking a long vowel with

a silent letter, even though the pattern chosen is not the correct one for this particular word.

- ○ In literacy studies, this is called "using but confusing," that is, using one vowel pattern but confusing it in another word.

Meaning Layer

- Throughout this course, we've tapped into the power of the meaning layer through our study of high-utility Latin and Greek affixes and roots, such as *cide/cise* ("kill") and *spect* ("see"). And we know how to apply the spelling-meaning connection. For example, when we notice the spelling of the root *spect* in the word *circumspect*, it can be a clue to the word's meaning. Those who are circumspect "look around" and are cautious.

- If the alphabetic layer of our spelling system was established with the Anglo-Saxons in Old English, and if the pattern layer was established after the Norman Conquest, when did all the classical roots in the meaning layer come into the English spelling system? The answer is during the Renaissance.

- The explosion of new knowledge during the Renaissance created a demand for new vocabulary. And with the rediscovery and renewed interest in the Greek and Latin cultures, the affixes and roots of Latin and Greek seemed to be the perfect tools to meet this demand.

- Let's close by exploring a powerful spelling pattern in the meaning layer. The following four words have the -*uble* suffix, but it is sometimes spelled *a-b-l-e* and sometimes spelled *i-b-l-e*: *affordable*, *credible*, *visible*, *reasonable*.
  - ○ Notice that if we take the -*uble* off and are left with a standalone base word, as in *affordable* or *reasonable*, the spelling is probably *a-b-l-e*. If we take the -*uble* off and are left with a root that cannot stand alone, the spelling is probably *i-b-l-e*, as in *credible* and *visible*.

    - Further, standalone base words that end in *e* usually drop the *e* and add *a-b-l-e*, as in *debate/debatable* or *dispose/disposable*.

    - There are a few exceptions to this pattern, particularly with words that have soft /c/ and /g/ sounds, such as *changeable*.

Resources for the English Spelling System

- A wonderful resource for learning more about the English spelling system is *Words Their Way* by Donald Bear, Marcia Invernizzi, Shane Templeton, and Francine Johnston.

- Another great resource is onelook.com, a comprehensive dictionary website. When you input a word, the site links you to a host of major, well-respected online dictionaries for more information. It also has an excellent reverse-dictionary function and allows you to search for words by specific affixes, roots, and spelling patterns.

Review Questions

1. What are the characteristics of children's knowledge in the alphabetic layer of learning spelling?

2. What are the characteristics of children's knowledge in the pattern layer of learning spelling?

3. When did classical roots come into the meaning layer of our spelling system and why?

A Medley of New Words

Lecture 32

In this lecture, we'll learn some additional words from the vocabulary grab bag—words that don't fit neatly into the themes of other lectures. As we did in an earlier grab-bag lecture, we'll also review some of the target words we've learned. Finally, we'll explore the importance of comparing and contrasting as a learning tool. As we'll see, when we compare concepts, ideas, or words, we're forced to identify the deep features that make two things similar or different. That type of thinking leads to long-term, meaningful learning.

Truckle (verb)

1. To submit; to be servile and submissive.

2. To fawn; to curry favor by flattering.

- The word *truckle* originally meant "to sleep in a truckle (trundle) bed." And in times past, those who slept in trundle beds were often servants. Thus, people who slept on truckle beds occupied the lower position, from which they truckled—or submitted—to those above them.

- *Truckle* is often followed by its collocate *to* in such phrases as "truckle to those in power" and "truckle to another country's demands."

Tendentious (adjective)

Marked by or favoring a particular point of view; showing a definite tendency, bias, or purpose; partisan.

- *Tendentious* brings to mind a listener who is not really listening to you, someone who is waiting for you to stop talking in order to present his or her own pre-decided viewpoint. With *tendentious*, the viewpoint espoused by the person is often a controversial one.

- We can use the related-word strategy to remember *tendentious*. This word is related to *tendency*, which comes from the Medieval Latin noun *tendentia*, meaning "inclination, leaning." When you lean too far toward one viewpoint, you may become biased and tendentious.

- The *ten* in *tendentious* also reminds us of another word, *tenet*, which is a principle, belief, or doctrine held to be true, often by members of a group or profession. In fact, *tenet* comes from the Latin verb form *tenet*, which literally means "he holds." In your vocabulary notebook, you might write that a tendentious person has a tendency to hold to his or her bias or purpose.

Tintinnabulation (noun)

A ringing, tinkling, or jingling sound, particularly the sound of bells.

Susurration (noun)

An indistinct whispering or rustling sound; a murmur.

Harrumph (verb)

1. To make a pretentious show of clearing one's throat. **2.** To offer brief critical comments.

- *Tintinnabulation*, *susurration*, and *harrumph* are all onomatopoeic; that is, they sound like the sounds they refer to: ringing bells, whispering, and ostentatious throat-clearing.

Trenchant (adjective)

Forceful and clear; penetrating, keen, and incisive.

- You often see *trenchant* used to describe people and language, as in *a trenchant argument*, *a trenchant analysis*, or *trenchant criticism*. *Trenchant* can also imply caustic and cutting.

- *Trenchant* comes from an Old French word spelled the same way, which meant "cutting and sharp," both literally and figuratively.

- Interestingly, *trenchant* is related to the word *trench*, which originally meant a track cut in wood and was later extended to mean a cut in the earth—what we think of as a trench. To remember *trenchant*, highlight the *trench* part in your vocabulary notebook and make the connection that a trench is a cut in the earth (a long, narrow ditch), and trenchant remarks are cutting, sharp, and incisive.

Target Word Review

- *Argot* is the specialized language of a particular group, while *jargon* is language that generally can't be understood by outsiders of a group. *Shibboleth* is a noun referring to a word, phrase, or custom used to distinguish one group from another.

- A *luddite* is someone who opposes the introduction of technological change.

- A *philistine* is a person who is not interested in intellectual pursuits and is indifferent or hostile to artistic and cultural values.

- A *quisling* is a traitor who aids an invading and/or occupying enemy force, often serving later in the puppet government.

- *Draconian* is an adjective used to describe a person who is exceedingly harsh, very severe, or cruel.

- *Avuncular* literally means "like an uncle," but it can also mean kind, friendly, patient, and indulgent.

- *Quixotic* is an adjective that means romantically idealistic.

- *Importune* is a verb that means to harass with repeated requests or to demand of someone insistently.

- *Discursive* is an adjective meaning rambling from topic to topic, aimless, or digressive.

- Finally, *turgid* is an adjective meaning swollen or overly ornamented speech.

Comparing and Contrasting

- A 2003 study of college students in the field of management sheds light on the power of comparing and contrasting as a learning tool.
    - Researchers asked the management students to analyze a set of negotiation training scenarios. The first group analyzed the cases one by one, while the second group compared the cases.

    - Not surprisingly, the researchers found that the group that compared the cases learned significantly more.

- When we compare concepts, ideas, or words, we're forced to identify the deep features that make two things similar or different. That type of thinking leads to long-term, meaningful learning.

- Try out the following compare, contrast, and connect vocabulary strategy for yourself:
    - First, go back through your vocabulary notebook and pick three words that you find are connected in some way. Perhaps the words all describe different types of people, such as *draconian*, *avuncular*, and *quixotic*.

    - Second, write down a situation in which you can apply all three words, perhaps one involving people you know or circumstances in which you've found yourself. Visualize these people or circumstances alongside the three words you've chosen.

    - Third, using the review scenarios in this lecture as a model, compare and contrast the words by comparing and contrasting the people or circumstances.

Review Questions

1. Word set: equivocal and tendentious. Someone who is __________ is unlikely to give __________ answers.

2. Word set: truckle and truculent. Someone who is __________ is unlikely to __________ to the authority of others.

3. Word set: trenchant and nascent. The speaker's remarks were insightful and __________; they did not seem to be the __________ thoughts of someone who had not examined the subject.

4. Word set: venal and invidious. The politician was accused of __________ behavior in awarding lucrative government contracts to his cronies.

5. Word set: timorous and pernicious. The strict policy of "going through channels" was __________ to creativity in the company.

6. Name the three onomatopoetic words in this lecture and identify the sounds they imitate.

Building Vocabulary through Games

Lecture 33

This lecture shares some ideas that will help you maintain and continue to improve your vocabulary knowledge after you finish this course. We'll start the lecture with some fun vocabulary games and activities. Then, we'll discuss how you can leverage the power of context to improve your reading and writing vocabulary, and we'll look at how you can make use of "golden lines" that you run across in your reading. Finally, we'll explore the concept of vocabulary banks to remind you of possible word choices in your writing for work or pleasure.

Vocabulary Games

- Vocabulary games can help ensure that your vocabulary knowledge is broad, meaning that you know many words and can make connections among them; deep, meaning that you have a good command of the words you know; and flexible, meaning that you can apply words to new situations when you speak and write. Vocabulary play is particularly helpful with flexibility because games provide opportunities and challenges for you to use and think about words in novel and creative ways.

- One fun vocabulary game is Hink Pinks, which involves word riddles with answers that rhyme. Each riddle also contains a clue to the number of syllables in the answer: If a player says "hink pink" after providing the initial riddle, the rhyming answer will consist of one-syllable words. If a player says, "hinky pinky," the answer will consist of two-syllable words, and if a player says, "hinkety pinkety," the answer will consist of three-syllable words.
    - The following are a few examples of Hink Pinks; the clue is shown first, followed by the answer: a mournful father/sad dad, ecstatic patriarch/happy pappy, evil preacher/sinister minister, pusillanimous blackbird/craven raven, fractious young person/wild child, and indolent flower/lazy daisy.

- To create your own Hink Pinks, first, think of a word pair that rhymes; often, it works to pair an adjective with a noun. Then, think of more sophisticated synonyms for both of the answer words; these synonyms make up your riddle. Finally, pose the riddle as a question with the syllable clue.

- To use the Hink Pinks game to review target vocabulary words, it's usually easier to start with the target words as your riddle, not your answer.

- Another engaging way to review a number of vocabulary words quickly is a game called Clue Review; a similar commercially published game is Hedbanz.
  - To play Clue Review, write 20 to 30 target vocabulary words on index cards. One player will serve as the clue giver, and the other will be in the "hot seat."

  - If you're on the hot seat, shuffle the deck of vocabulary cards face down, randomly take one card from the deck, and place it on your forehead so that the clue giver can see the word, but you cannot.

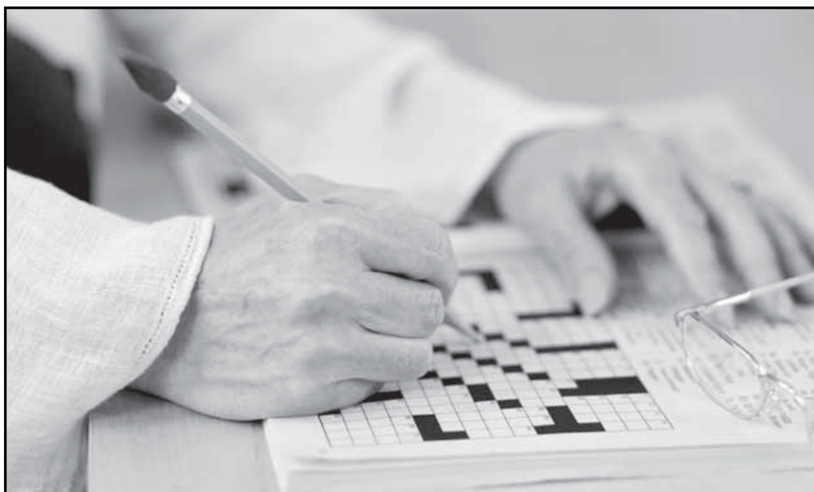
  - The clue giver then provides clues for you to guess the word. The clues can be a definition, a related word, or a personal connection to the word. For example, for the word *gemütlichkeit*, the clue giver might say, "German loanword referring to a feeling of coziness and comfort," or the clue giver might say, "I think of Thanksgiving when I hear this word."

  - If you guess the right word, you put the card down and pull the next card in the deck. If you can't guess the word, you can pass, or the clue giver can pass if he or she can't come up with a good clue. The object of the game is for the pair of players to correctly identify all the cards from the deck without either one saying pass. Once you've gone through the deck, switch roles.

- The commercially published game Taboo is excellent for developing vocabulary flexibility, that is, using words in new and creative ways.
    - This game is similar to Clue Review in that one player gives his or her partner clues to a target word printed on a card. However, there are a number of taboo words that the clue giver is not allowed to use in giving clues, and these words are the ones that come to mind most readily as clues.

    - For example, imagine that you're the clue giver and you choose a card with the name John F. Kennedy. Of course, the first clue you think of might be "1960s president," but *president* would probably be one of the taboo words, as would *assassination*, *Bay of Pigs*, *Jacqueline Kennedy*, and *grassy knoll*. As the clue giver, you have to think flexibly and make personal connections to the target words to avoid using the taboo words.

    - Even if Taboo doesn't lend itself specifically to reviewing the target words in this course, it has a great deal in common with



© Stockbyte/Thinkstock.

You can increase your vocabulary knowledge by acting out target words in a game of charades, playing Scrabble or Words with Friends, or doing crossword puzzles.

some of our strategies as lifelong vocabulary learners: thinking flexibly, making connections, and using synonyms, antonyms, and related words.

Leveraging Context

- As we've said, we pick up most of our new vocabulary knowledge incidentally, from reading in context. Thus, reading for meaning is one of the best things you can do to improve your vocabulary.

- Imagine that you're reading a book, and you encounter the following sentence: "Miles disliked his job, primarily because of his bumptious boss."
    - If you didn't already know the meaning of *bumptious*, this context wouldn't be too supportive. You might get the idea that *bumptious* is negative, but you wouldn't know whether the word meant conniving, wishy-washy, or something else.

    - The sentence doesn't give you enough context to infer the specific meaning of *bumptious*, and in fact, research shows that a single contextual encounter with an unfamiliar word isn't always sufficient for readers to infer its exact meaning.

- But if that's true, how is it that we pick up most of our new vocabulary from reading in context? The answer is that we learn words incrementally; this is the dimmer switch phenomenon we discussed earlier. You may not be able to infer the meaning of *bumptious* after your first encounter, but each time you encounter the word in a new context, its meaning gradually grows brighter in your mental lexicon.

- You can take several steps to speed up this incremental process. First, you can try to infer the meaning of the word from the contextual information that surrounds it, and you can put that information together with clues within the word, such as Latin and Greek affixes and roots. The key here is to do what literacy experts Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey suggest: "Look inside the word and outside the word" for clues.

- You might also mark unfamiliar words to look up later so that you don't lose the flow of your reading. Set aside some time to check a set of words in the dictionary; look at all the meanings of a particular word and see which one best fits the context. Write down all the important information about the word in your vocabulary notebook, including its definition, part of speech, and morphology.

- Finally, take a few minutes more to examine a number of usage examples. Instead of waiting until the next time you happen to encounter the unfamiliar word, this step allows you to experience it several times in rich context. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* is known for having a number of excellent usage examples, as is vocabulary.com, a free online dictionary.

Golden Lines

- This discussion of context brings up another critical aspect of vocabulary knowledge: knowing how to use words—even relatively simple words—effectively to communicate what you want. And there is no better way to get a feel for how to use words effectively than by examining great writing.

- Consider this memorable quotation from the great Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi: "You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist." Some might argue that reading this line won't improve your vocabulary because you know all the words already. But it could also be argued that knowing how to craft a beautiful sentence with the precise word—even a simple one—is perhaps the ultimate goal of building a better vocabulary.

- In your vocabulary notebook, create a section called "The Golden Line." As you come across a turn of phrase that stuns you with its beauty, or cuts right through you, or makes you laugh, record it in this section of your notebook to enjoy over and over. You might even try to memorize some of your golden lines; memorizing forces you to delve into the meaning of the words and allows you to develop a feel for the music and rhythm of the language.

Vocabulary Banks

- A vocabulary bank is a list of high-utility words and phrases that you create and keep handy while writing—whether for your job or for pleasure—to remind you of possible word choices.

- For example, if you do a fair amount of informational writing in your job, you might want to create a vocabulary bank of summarizing words to ensure that you don't always rely on the phrase *in conclusion*.
  - This bank might include the following words and phrases: *consequently*, *taken as a whole*, *in other words*, *in short*, *in summary*, *in simpler terms*, *on the whole*, and *therefore*.[2]

  - Or you might have a bank of words that signal cause/effect relationships, such as *thus*, *therefore*, *as a result*, *this led to*, *this gave rise to*, *in turn*, *for this reason*, *it follows*, *consequently*, *the ramifications of*.

- You're probably familiar with all these words and phrases, but you may not necessarily be able to bring them to mind when you need them. A vocabulary bank serves as a repository of important words for you to keep as a handy reference and can help add precision and variety to your writing.

Review Questions

1. Solve the following Hink Pinks: a timorous agent provocateur (hink pink), a less crooked quisling (hinky pinky), a religious man's claptrap (hink pink), a fomenter experiencing a diminuendo (hinkety pinkety)

2. Practice leveraging context with at least one new word you encounter this week.

---

[2] Vocabulary-bank suggestions drawn from the work of researchers Jeff Zwiers and Dianna Townsend.

3. Create a "Golden Lines" section in your vocabulary notebook and record some of your favorite lines from literature, speeches, or other sources.

4. Create a vocabulary bank of company buzzwords, report language, or words in another applicable category to use in your everyday writing.

Words English Borrowed and Never Returned

Lecture 34

Unlike some languages, English is democratic in the sense that it has always been open to acquiring new words from other languages. In fact, substantially more than half of English vocabulary is from languages other than its Anglo-Saxon ancestor, Old English. This lecture is the first of two on words and phrases borrowed into English from other languages. We'll explore some words that are obviously from a different language, such as *faux pas* (an embarrassing social blunder), and words that have become so common in English you might not be aware they were ever borrowed, such as *grenade*, *mustang*, and *shampoo*.

Loanwords from around the World

- To get a sense of the breadth and diversity of the words English has borrowed from other languages, let's begin with a brief tour of global languages and the loanwords we have adopted from them.
    - From Italian, we get such musical words as *a cappella*, *maestro*, *opera*, and *virtuoso*; artistic words, including *fresco*, *graffiti*, *stucco*, and *terra cotta*; and of course, culinary words, such as *pasta*, *al dente*, and *gusto*.
    - From French, we get *quiche*, *salon*, and a number of military terms, including *lieutenant*, *bayonet*, *artillery*, *coup d'état*, *rendezvous*, and *esprit de corps*.
    - Not surprisingly, Spanish has given us many words we associate with the American Southwest, including *coyote*, *desperado*, *tortilla*, *lariat*, and *mustang*.
    - We have German to thank German for *kindergarten* and *sauerkraut*, and Yiddish for *bagels*, *schleps*, *schmucks*, and *mavens*.
    - Gaelic has given us *banshee*, *slogan*, and *whiskey*, which was literally translated as "water of life." The Gaelic word for

whiskey was probably itself a loan translation from Medieval Latin *aqua vitae*.

  - *Banzai*, *karaoke*, and *tycoon* come from Japanese, and Sanskrit gave us *karma*, *nirvana*, *yoga*, and *shampoo*.

  - Finally, high school students probably remain annoyed at Arabic for giving us *algebra*.

- This relatively short list gives us a sense of the sponge-like quality of English, soaking up words from just about everywhere. As a result, our language has an incredibly rich vocabulary and allows us to make finer shades of distinction among related concepts.

Schadenfreude (noun)

Satisfaction, pleasure, or malicious joy at someone else's misfortune.

- *Schadenfreude*, a German word, came into English in the 19th century. In German, *schaden* means "damage, harm, injury," and *freude* means "joy." Thus, *schadenfreude* literally means "damage-joy," which seems appropriate to describe the secret sense of pleasure we feel when someone else runs into difficulty.

- Of course, English-speaking people have always felt schadenfreude, but we didn't have the right word for it. Although there were some rare English words that were close synonyms for this word, for some reason, they never caught on. The fact that *schadenfreude* was used on an episode of *The Simpsons* seems to attest to its arrival in mainstream American culture. Homer, the father in this cartoon, expresses joy at a rival's business failing, and his daughter Lisa uses the word and defines it for him.

Zeitgeist (noun)

The spirit, attitude, or general outlook of a specific period; the moral, cultural, and intellectual climate of an era.

- In German, *zeit* means “time,” and *geist* means “ghost” or “spirit.” Thus, *zeitgeist* literally means “time-spirit,” or the “spirit of the times.” The word might be used in context as follows: “Are we all primarily shaped by the zeitgeist in which we grow up? Or are there a few among us—the geniuses, the explorers, the forward-thinkers—who can rise above their time in history and see the world in an entirely new way?”

- To remember *zeitgeist*, pick a time period or decade that stands out to you and make a list of the cultural touchstones—the words, ideas, images, and events—that defined that period.

Weltschmerz (noun)

Sadness over the evils of the world.

- In German *welt* means “world,” and *schmerz* means “pain.” When you experience weltschmerz, you experience “world-pain” or “world weariness,” pain at the evils and injustices in the world.

© CREATISTA/iStock/Thinkstock.

Flappers, gangsters, Prohibition, and early automobiles were all part of the zeitgeist of the Roaring Twenties.

- *Weltschmerz* can also denote the depression caused by feeling the world's woes too sharply.

Éminence grise (noun)

1. A powerful decision maker or advisor who operates behind the scenes.

2. An elder statesman or eminent senior member of a group.

- The term *éminence grise* has an interesting history, recounted in *The Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories*.
    - Born François-Joseph le Clerc du Tremblay in 1577, the priest later known as Father Joseph joined the Capuchin Order in 1599. In 1611, he met Cardinal Richelieu, Louis XIII's politically ambitious chief minister, and was appointed the cardinal's personal secretary. The two made quite a powerful pair.

    - Father Joseph became far more than just Richelieu's secretary, also serving as his confidant, his personal confessor, and even his secret agent. Many believed that Father Joseph wielded much more influence behind the scenes than was publicly acknowledged.

    - The pair's rivals at court referred to them disparagingly behind their backs. Richelieu was called L'Éminence Rouge, "the red eminence," because of his scarlet cardinal's robes. Father Joseph, who wore the habit of the Capuchins, was referred to as L'Éminence Grise, "the gray eminence."

- However, *éminence grise* did not appear in general use in English until the 1920s. Aldous Huxley's 1941 study of Father Joseph, entitled *Grey Eminence*, helped further establish the term in English.

- In the second half of the 20th century, authors who weren't aware of the original meaning of *éminence grise* ("a behind-the-scenes operator") started using it to in a positive sense to refer to an elder

statesman. As *The Merriam-Webster* account relates, "Doubtless the writers have mistakenly assumed that *éminence grise* derived from the notion that eminent senior figures are typically gray-haired." For this reason, today, the term has two contradictory meanings today.

Mugwump (noun)

1. A person, especially a politician, who is unable to make up his or her mind on an issue.
2. A person who remains neutral or independent on a controversial issue.

- *Mugwump* originally comes from a word in a Native American Algonquian dialect that meant "important person." By the 1830s, English speakers were using *mugwump* to mean "great man, boss, important person" in a jesting, chiding sense to poke fun at people who thought particularly highly of themselves.

- Then, during the presidential election of 1884, the meaning of *mugwump* shifted.
    - James G. Blaine, the Republican candidate, was running against Grover Cleveland, the Democratic candidate. A faction of Republican political activists who were highly critical of the financial corruption associated with Blaine left the Republican Party to support the Democratic candidate, Cleveland.

    - The Republicans who remained loyal to Blaine weren't happy and dubbed the Republican turncoats *mugwumps*, deriding their holier-than-thou, pompous attitudes and the supercilious way in which they tried to hold themselves above party politics.

    - From this, we get our current definition of *mugwump* as a person who is unable to make up his or her mind about an issue or someone who remains neutral over a controversial issue. Consider for example, this context sentence: "The senator

was too much of a mugwump to take a stand on any hotly contested issue."

- Interestingly, an apocryphal etymology of *mugwump* surfaced in the 1930s. In a speech delivered in 1936, Congressman Albert J. Engel explained that a mugwump was "a bird who sits with its mug on one side of the fence and its wump on the other." Although this etymology is false, it provides us with a humorous visual to remember the word.

Bête noire (noun)

A person or thing that is particularly disliked, dreaded, or avoided.

- *Bête noire* came into English in the early 1800s from a French word that, literally translated, means "black beast." The modern definition is illustrated by the following context sentence: "Fidel Castro has been the bête noire of U.S. presidents for more than 50 years."

- *Bête noire* isn't restricted to people one dislikes or would like to avoid but can also be used for things that fall into the same category. For example: "High-fructose corn syrup has become the bête noire of nutritionists."

- Synonyms and related words for *bête noire* include *archrival*, *nemesis*, *bugbear*, and *anathema*.

Doppelgänger (noun)

1. A ghostly double of a living person that haunts its living counterpart.
2. Someone who has a close, even eerily close, resemblance to another.

- Edgar Allan Poe's short story "William Wilson," first published in 1839, is an exploration of the idea of a doppelgänger. In the story,

Poe uses the physical manifestation of the doppelgänger to explore the psychological alter ego of the narrator.

- The story is narrated by the title character, William Wilson, who as a boy attended a strict boarding school in England. There, he felt superior to all his classmates except one, another boy who shared his name, William Wilson. This other William Wilson looked similar to (but not exactly like) William, dressed like William, and even imitated William's voice but only in a whisper.

- The other William becomes the narrator's competitor and rival. One night, the narrator sneaks into his rival's bedroom to play a practical joke, but he's horrified to discover that his rival's face has transformed and now looks exactly like his own.

- For the rest of the story, William's lookalike rival haunts him, showing up at different points in his life, thwarting his attempts at vice and evil activity, and always whispering, "William Wilson" in his ear. In the last scene, William finally confronts his lookalike and stabs him with a sword. But then, to his horror, the scene changes, and William is no longer looking at his rival; instead, he is gazing into a mirror in which he sees himself, stabbed and bleeding. William has killed himself.

- Although *doppelgänger* is still used to refer to such ghostly doubles, it has recently taken on a second meaning, referring to someone who closely resembles another person.

- Literally translated from German, *doppelgänger* means "double-goer" or "double-walker." The word didn't enter English until the 1830s, but the concept of spirit doubles and alter egos is found in myth and folklore from cultures around the world. In some traditions, if a friend or family member sees your doppelgänger, it's considered a harbinger of illness or danger. If you see your own doppelgänger, it's an omen of your death.

Review Questions

1. Lindsay felt a thrill of __________ when the committee decided the case in her favor and against Jim; he had been her ___________ in the department for months.

2. A sense of ___________ was perhaps part of the ___________ of the Depression era.

3. Henry Kissinger might be characterized as the ___________ behind the foreign policy of Richard Nixon.

4. Steve is a lucky guy; his girlfriend is brilliant and could be Julia Roberts's ___________.

5. Since his reelection by a very narrow margin, the senator had become a bit of a ___________, reluctant to take decisive action in Congress.

More Foreign Loan Words
Lecture 35

As we saw in our last lecture, English has borrowed many words from many different languages. However, the hallmark of a powerful vocabulary is not simply knowing a bunch of fancy words; rather, it's knowing the exact word to use in a specific context or situation. That's why we've spent so much time in this course delving into the meanings of words and exploring how each word differs in meaning from closely related synonyms. As the first target word in this lecture implies, it's often not the longest or most sophisticated word that is the best choice but the word that is chosen to fit the situation most precisely.

Mot juste (noun)

The exact, appropriate word or expression for a situation.

- Mark Twain once said, "The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter—'tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning." Our first target term, *mot juste*, captures this idea of the "just right word."

- Consider, for example, this well-known line from President John F. Kennedy's 1961 inaugural address: "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."
  - Changing just one word changes the feel of the entire sentence: "Request not what your country can do for you, request what you can do for your country." *Ask*, a shorter and some might say less sophisticated word than *request*, is actually the better choice in this instance.

  - The reason *ask* is the better choice here relates to the fact that there is no such thing as an exact synonym in English. Words may carry similar denotations (primary, literal meanings),

but they generally have different connotations (secondary meanings that include the array of associations with a word).

  - Both *ask* and *request* share the same general denotation: to inquire of someone. However, *request* has the added connotation of being more formal and polite than *ask*. When you request something, it is often as a favor or courtesy. Clearly, *request* was not the "just right word" in the context of President Kennedy's speech.

- In French, *mot* means "word" and *juste* means "exact"; literally, *mot juste* is the "exact word." *Mot juste* is sometimes confused with *bon mot*, "good word," which is a witty comment or clever remark.

Insouciant (adjective)

Free from concern, worry, or anxiety; carefree; nonchalant.

- *Insouciant* is another borrowing from French, used to describe a condition we seem to experience all too rarely—that of being lighthearted and carefree. Synonyms for *insouciant* include *debonair*, *breezy*, and *jaunty*.

Gestalt (noun)

A pattern possessing qualities as a whole that cannot be described merely as a sum of its parts.

- In its most literal meaning, *gestalt* is a German word meaning "shape, form, appearance." The word is often used in English to mean the gist of something or its general qualities. It is the general outline that matters with *gestalt*, not the details.

- You might hear *gestalt* used as an adjective, as in: "Rather than grade the students' essays by analyzing each component, such as style, voice, and word choice, the English teachers decided to take a gestalt approach, evaluating each essay as a whole."

- According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, *gestalt* came into English in 1922, but in Germany, the concept of *gestalt* had been used as the basis of a school of psychology that developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. One of the main beliefs of gestalt psychologists is that the mind perceives external stimuli as a whole, at least initially, rather than as individual parts.

Cachet (noun)

Superior status, privilege.

- *Cachet* is often used in connection with fashion, as in: "On the university campus, wearing North Face jackets and UGG boots carries a certain cachet among college students."

- According to Joyn Ayto's *Dictionary of Word Origins*, *cachet* came into English in the 1630s as a Scottish borrowing of the French word *cachet*, which meant "seal affixed to a letter or document." In the 19th century, this "seal" meaning was extended to the more figurative sense of "a personal stamp, a distinguishing characteristic." This meaning itself was later further extended to "prestige and status."

- *Cachet* is sometimes confused with *cache*. Although the two words are distantly related, *cache* is a noun referring to either a hiding place for storing for provisions, valuables, or weapons or the actual store of valuables itself. For example: "Thankfully, the army found the terrorists' cache of weapons before they could use them."

Agent provocateur (noun)

A secret agent hired to incite suspected persons to illegal action that will make them liable to punishment.

Sangfroid (noun)

Coolness and composure, especially in trying circumstances.

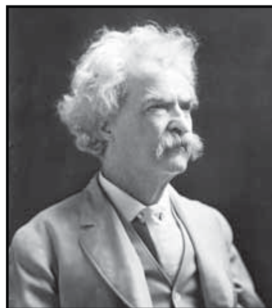
- The former professional quarterback Joe Montana serves as a great example of sangfroid. Montana had a Hall of Fame career, winning a national college championship at Notre Dame and four Super Bowls with the San Francisco 49ers.
    - Besides his athletic ability, what made Montana great was his calmness in high-pressure situations. In fact, he rallied his team to 31 comeback wins when the 49ers were behind in the fourth quarter.
    - His unflappable demeanor and ability to win under pressure earned Montana his two most famous nicknames, Joe Cool and the Comeback Kid.

- In French, *sang* means "blood," and *froid* means "cool." Thus, *sangfroid* literally means "cool blood." A synonym for *sangfroid*, also from French, is *aplomb*, meaning "grace under pressure."

Lagniappe (noun)

A small gift given by a storeowner to a customer; any small extra gift or benefit.

- *The American Heritage Dictionary* identifies *lagniappe* as a New Orleans creole word derived from the New World Spanish word *la napa*, meaning "the gift." It's not a surprise that this Spanish word acquired its current French spelling in New Orleans, a cosmopolitan city where both Spanish and French were spoken. Some linguists speculate that the original Spanish word actually came from an indigenous Native American word that meant "to give more."



© Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-5513.

According to Mark Twain in *Life on the Mississippi*, *lagniappe* was a word "worth travelling to New Orleans to get."

Gemütlichkeit (noun)

An atmosphere characterized by a cheerful mood; peace of mind, with the connotation of fellowship and coziness.

- *Gemütlichkeit* is a loanword from German that brings to mind the atmosphere around the table for many families at Thanksgiving—warm, welcoming, cozy, and comfortable, with a dose of camaraderie and togetherness. Consider the word in context: "The impromptu get-together created a sense of gemütlichkeit among the new neighbors."

- The German word at the root of *gemütlichkeit* is the noun *gemüt*, which means "soul, mind, feeling" and is a cognate with the English word *mood*.

Review Questions

1. The aura of __________ emanated by Josh made him irresistible to most women.

2. The gang members suspected one in their midst of being an __________ employed by the police.

3. Many people experience a sense of __________ with family and friends during the holiday season.

4. Offering a __________ is one way for storeowners to retain customers.

5. The writer was known for spending hours searching for the __________.

6. The craftsman believed that his expensive handmade jewelry would be purchased by those seeking social __________.

7. Having furiously scribbled parts of the solution on blackboards around the room, when the mathematician reviewed her equations, she immediately recognized the ________ of her work.

8. Maria's __________ attitude toward life made her a fun-loving travel companion.

Forgotten Words and Neologisms

Lecture 36

In this lecture, we will meet some old words and some new ones. Specifically, we will look back and explore some words in English that we may have forgotten about or that may be a bit underused but that still have a lot of life left in them. We'll then look forward and explore some neologisms, or new words, that have made their way into English in the last 50 years or so. We'll end the course with a review of all we've accomplished and some tips for continuing to build your vocabulary into the future.

Sockdolager (noun)

1. A strong, decisive, final blow; a finisher.
2. Something or someone outstanding or exceptional.

- This target word may lay claim to being one of the last words heard by President Abraham Lincoln.
  - As you know, on the night of his assassination, President Lincoln was sitting in Ford's Theater, watching Tom Taylor's play *Our American Cousin*.
  - John Wilkes Booth knew the play well, and, he was waiting for the following line, which was sure to trigger a laugh: "Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, you sockdologising old man-trap." The audience burst into laughter and, amidst the noise, Booth fatally shot Lincoln.
- *Sockdolager* can be used literally, as in: "That was one sockdolager of a punch that knocked the heavyweight champion out cold." It can also be used figuratively, as in: "Her closing argument was a real sockdolager that won the debate for her team." In this figurative sense, *sockdolager* is a conclusive or decisive answer or remark that settles the matter.

- *Sockdolager* has also acquired a second sense of something or someone outstanding or exceptional, as in: "Boy, that snowstorm was a real sockdolager; we were hit with three feet at once!"

- *Sockdolager*'s etymology is a bit uncertain, but it first showed up around 1830 and may be a playful corruption of the word *doxology*, which refers to a few lines of praise to God sung at the end of a hymn. Originally, *sockdolager* may have involved the humorous notion of a "righteous" blow that ends a fight.

Peckish (adjective)

1. Somewhat hungry.

2. Irritable, touchy.

- *Peckish* brings to mind the feeling we all get around 11:15 a.m., when it has been some hours since breakfast, and we're starting to feel a bit hungry. It also carries a second sense of slightly irritable, as in: "He's usually good-natured, but his illness has caused him to be peckish lately."

- Peckish literally means "disposed to peck." In your vocabulary notebook, highlight *peck* and write down that a peckish person will peck at food when feeling a bit hungry.

Evanescent (adjective)

1. Fleeting, of short duration, vanishing or likely to vanish.

2. Fragile, diaphanous, and unsubstantial.

- *Evanescent* refers to all things temporary, such as rainbows or mirages. The word itself seems to have a delicate, almost ghostly quality, as if it could be whisked away by the slightest breeze.

- Both *vanish* and *evanescent* are derived from the same Latin origin. The *e*- in *evanescent* is an assimilated prefix of *ex*-, meaning "out."

And the *van* comes from the Latin *vanesco*, meaning "to vanish." In your vocabulary notebook, make a note that evanescent things vanish quickly.

Feckless (adjective)

1. Weak and ineffective.
2. Worthless, lazy, and irresponsible.

- *Feckless* comes from a Scottish word, *feck*, which was a shortened form of *effect* and meant "effect, value, and vigor." If you add the suffix -*less* to *feck*, you get "without effect, value or vigor."

Profligate (noun)

Someone who is given to wildly extravagant and grossly self-indulgent behavior.

Generating New Words

- New words are introduced into English every day, although not all of them survive. When a new word is coined and is in the process of entering common use, it's called a *neologism*. This word comes from the Greek prefix *neo*-, meaning "new," and the Greek noun *logos*, meaning "word."

- *Nonce words* are those invented for a particular occasion; they are typically used spontaneously and just once. One of the most famous of all nonce words came from the classic 1964 Disney musical *Mary Poppins*: *supercalifragilisticexpialidocious*.

- A language might also expand its lexicon by borrowing words from another language. We discussed this phenomenon in the two lectures that explored such words as *insouciant* from French and *gemütlichkeit* from German.

- Finally, a language can generate new words by combining existing words and word parts. Examples of this type of word generation include combining affixes and roots to create new words or combining parts from other words to form portmanteau words, as we saw with *gerrymander*.

Meme (noun)

An idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person in a culture.

- Although it is now commonly used with regard to the Internet, *meme* was not originally an Internet term. It was coined in 1976 by the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins.
    - Dawkins's coinage deliberately drew on Greek and was purposely imitative, as he explains in his book *The Selfish Gene*:

        > We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*. "Mimeme" comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like "gene." I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to *meme*. If it is any consolation, it could alternatively be thought of as being related to "memory," or to the French word *même*. It should be pronounced to rhyme with "cream."

    - In this explanation of how he created a new word, Dawkins explicitly calls attention to its Greek root and meaning, its pronunciation, and its relationship to a known word, *gene*.

    - In fact, Dawkins based his idea of memes on the behavior of genes, in that they can replicate and mutate.

- Recently, *meme* has gained new life online as a descriptor of pictures, videos, phrases, and themes that "go viral"—that is, that get shared or modified, then reposted multiple times. Internet

memes are often creative or humorous and are passed among friends through e-mails or social media posts.

Quark (noun)

An elementary subatomic particle proposed as the fundamental unit of matter.

- Science and technology have always been areas that demand new words and new uses for old ones. Examples include *boson*, named after Indian physicist Satyendra Nath Bose; *fermion*, named for Enrico Fermi; and *quark*, coined by physicist Murray Gell-Mann. All three of these are types of subatomic particles.

- According to *The Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories*, Gell-Mann was looking for a name for a certain type of hypothetical subatomic particle. He was used to playing around with such names as *squork* for peculiar objects, and he had come up with the pronunciation /kwork/ (to rhyme with *pork*), but he had not come up with a spelling for the word.
    - Then, he came upon the word *quark* in the following lines from James Joyce's classic *Finnegans Wake*: "Three quarks for Muster Mark! / Sure he has not got much of a bark / And sure any he has it's all beside the mark."

    - Gell-Mann wasn't sure how to pronounce the word, but he said, "In any case, the number three fitted perfectly the way quarks occur in nature." He had theorized that quarks could only exist in threes in making up a proton.

    - Gell-Mann wanted to keep Joyce's spelling of *quark*, but he didn't want to pronounce it as Joyce had probably intended (/kwark/ to rhyme with *lark*). He decided to keep his original pronunciation of *quark* as rhyming with *pork*. Of course, in general use, many non-physicists pronounce the word the way it looks: /kwark/.

- And where did Joyce get *quark* from? Apparently, it came from a German word for a cheese that is in the early stages of manufacture. Thus, this quirky word went from being a German word for a dairy product, to a playful word in an experimental novel, to a neologism for a subatomic particle.

Muggle (noun)

A person who lacks a particular skill or knowledge of a subject; someone who is regarded as inferior in some way.

- Our last target word comes from one of the best-selling book series of all time, *Harry Potter* by J. K. Rowling. In Rowling's books, a *muggle* is a non-magical person, an ordinary human. Rowling coined *muggle* based on the British term *mug*, which is slang for "a gullible person or a dupe."

- *Muggle* has now made its way into common usage to mean a person who lacks knowledge of a subject or is inferior in some way.

© Anna Berkut/iStock/Thinkstock.

Your vocabulary notebook is a powerful tool for learning that will continue to evolve as your vocabulary grows.

Looking Backward and Forward

- Throughout this course, we have delved into the history and meaning of scores of powerful, lively, and beautiful words. But even beyond building a rich treasury of words, we've also acquired some valuable strategies for learning vocabulary, such as making personal connections, organizing by schema, looking for affixes and roots, and keeping a vocabulary notebook.

- As you move beyond this course, keep in mind these tips for continuing to build your vocabulary:
    - First, read, talk, and write! Find a subject that inspires you, such as yoga, politics, or jazz; read about it; and discuss it with others. Consider writing a blog to share your thoughts with others who have the same interests that you have.

    - Second, keep up with your vocabulary notebook. As you're reading, take note of unfamiliar and interesting words. Once a week, choose two or three of those words and record them in your vocabulary notebook, just as we've done throughout this course. Delve into them deeply.

    - Third, use it or lose it: Challenge yourself to try out one interesting word per day from your notebook. Choose a word that will add some spice, color, or precision to your conversation. Remember, each time you use a word is one more step toward owning that word.

Review Questions

1. Even as a boy, the tyro physicist had been fascinated by the behavior of proton, electrons, and __________.

2. "Parents can be such __________," the teenage girl remarked to her friend. "They have no knowledge of Internet __________ or texting slang."

3. A mid-morning snack is an excellent antidote when one starts feeling __________ around 11:00 a.m.

4. Blakely's presentation was a true __________; the executives were bowled over by her creative ideas.

5. With her endless shopping trips, spa visits, and restaurant meals, Bonita was considered a __________ by her relatives.

6. Pam's __________ son-in-law couldn't hold a job and wouldn't help out around the house.

7. Without continuing practice and effort, new vocabulary knowledge can be as __________ as the wind.

Answers to Review Questions

Lecture 1

1. Definitions, context, connections, morphology, semantic chunking.

2. According to schema theory, we organize and categorize knowledge by abstract mental frameworks (*schema*). Semantic chunking takes advantage of this approach to organizing knowledge by grouping related words into categories according to their meaning.

3. procrustean

4. factotum

Lecture 2

1. Words that are related in spelling are often related in meaning, despite changes in sound.

2. Definitions, context sentences, personal connections, and notes on morphology and etymology.

3. circumspect

4. factitious

Lecture 3

1. apocryphal

2. mountebank

3. hornswoggle

4. sophist

5. ersatz

6. specious

7. spurious

8. skulduggery/machinations

Lecture 4

1. noisome

2. gadfly

3. mawkish

4. querulous

5. maudlin

6. treacle

7. *Fulsome* can mean either "excessively or insincerely lavish" or "abundant." Depending on which meaning is intended, *fulsome praise* could be interpreted negatively or positively.

8. scabrous

Lecture 5

1. bellicose

2. rapacious

3. halcyon

4. imbroglio

5. propitiate

6. truculent

7. mollycoddle/contumacious

8. donnybrook

9. quiescent

Lecture 6

1. reparable → repair → "capable of being repaired"

2.

abysmal

Definition, Part of Speech: adjective extremely poor or bad	Synonyms: wretched, atrocious, awful, execrable
Examples: Abysmal papers handed in by students in a freshman composition class	Non-Examples, Antonyms: Work of a Nobel Prize–winning author excellent, exceptional, superior, first-rate

3. toothsome

4. castigated

5. circumlocution

6. captious

Lecture 7

1. malfeasance

2. venal

3. malediction

4. malinger

5. turpitude

6. malaise

7. maladroit

8. malefactor

9. invidious

10. malcontent

11. insidious

Lecture 8

1. puerile

2. *Inchoate* sometimes emphasizes what is not present in the beginning stages, focusing on the more "lacking" aspects of a beginning. In

contrast, *nascent* stresses the more developing, growing, positive aspects of the beginning stage.

3. moribund

4. tyro

5. ingénue

6. dilettante

7. callow

Lecture 9

1. oenophile

2. misanthrope

3. philatelist

4. agoraphobia, glossophobia, acrophobia

5. execrate

6. canoodling

7. xenophobia

Lecture 10

1. No. The hoi polloi are the common people, who are not generally thought of as having the refined manners and tastes of patricians.

2. bromides

3. nonpareil
4. quotidian
5. banal
6. insipid/vapid
7. prosaic

Lecture 11

1. saturnine
2. Sisyphean
3. Sword of Damocles/Gordian knot
4. mercurial
5. Promethean
6. saturnalia

Lecture 12

1. sycophants/obsequious
2. blandishments
3. unctuous
4. bloviate

5. bumptious

6. hubris

7. wheedling

8. bombast

9. supercilious

Lecture 13

1. The root *umbr*, meaning "shade, shadow," is found in the middle of *adumbrate*, a word that means "to give a sketchy or shadowy outline of."

2. emancipation

3. dishabille

4. prescient

Lecture 14

1. pontificates

2. dissembled

3. perfidious

4. agitprop

5. equivocal

6. dogmatic

7. apostate

Lecture 15

1. philippic

2. calumny/vilified

3. fulminated

4. obloquy

5. bowdlerize

6. pithy

7. foment

8. laconic

Lecture 16

1. badinage

2. palaver

3. claptrap/bunk

4. jeremiad

5. paean

6. maundering

7. panegyric

8. pilloried

9. pablum

Lecture 17

1. gerrymandering

2. luddite

3. malapropism

4. billingsgate

5. quisling

6. draconian/bedlam

7. quixotic

Lecture 18

1. philistine

2. perspicacious

3. didactic

4. exegesis

5. Erudite means “learned or scholarly”; recondite means “difficult to understand”; esoteric means “understood by only a select group.”

6. Induction is the process of inferring general principles from individual facts; deduction is the process of reasoning in which a conclusion necessarily follows from the stated premises.

Lecture 19

1. facile
2. torpor/torpid
3. sedulous/indolent
4. turbid/turgid
5. alacrity

Lecture 20

1. concatenation
2. lacuna
3. schism
4. maw
5. to split or divide by cutting; to cling to
6. A cabal is a secret group, often meeting for the purposes of treachery. A coterie is a small group of people who share a common interest or purpose; *coterie* doesn't carry the negative connotations of *cabal*.
7. Diaspora

Lecture 21

1. Both words can mean "to relinquish power," but *abdicate* is usually reserved for offices of higher power, such as a kingship.

2. antediluvian

3. solipsism

4. ablution

5. denuded

6. absquatulate

7. nihilism

8. protean

Lecture 22

1. asperity

2. importuning/fractious

3. inured

4. splenetic

5. Phlegmatic means "showing little emotion"; stoic means "seemingly indifferent to pleasure or pain; stolid means "having or expressing little or no sensibility."

Lecture 23

1. bravado

2. braggadocio

3. chutzpah/moxie

4. temerity

5. intrepid

6. pusillanimous

7. craven

8. fortitude

9. timorous

Lecture 24

1. maudlin

2. callow

3. supercilious

4. Didactic means "overly preachy and instructive"; pedantic means "characterized by a narrow, ostentatious concern for book learning."

5. a pattern or scheme into which someone or something is forced

Lecture 25

1. perdition/extirpate

2. Regicide is the murder of a ruler (king or queen); patricide is the murder of one's father; and parricide is the murder of a parent or close relative.

3. desuetude

4. caesura

5. fin de siècle

6. abrogated

7. vivisection

Lecture 26

1. bumptious

2. dissembling

3. stultifying

4. frisson

5. detritus

6. a choice between what is available and nothing

Lecture 27

1. sesquipedalian

2. argot

3. lingua franca

4. discursive

5. sobriquet

6. jargon

7. The vernacular is the language of the common people; a dialect is the language of a specific region or social class.

8. shibboleth

9. somniloquy

Lecture 28

1. Homophones are words that sound the same but are spelled differently and have different meanings. Homographs are words that are spelled the same but have different pronunciations and meanings. Homonyms are words that are spelled and pronounced the same but have different meanings.

2. Toponyms are place-names or words derived from place names; eponyms are words derived from the names of people.

3. portmanteau words/clipped words

4. spoonerism

5. acronyms

Lecture 29

1. Both *salubrious* and *salutary* can describe something that's good for your health, but *salutary* can also describe something that's beneficial or promotes improvement in a more general sense.

2. officious

3. avuncular

4. mordant

5. virulent

6. piquant

7. pernicious

Lecture 30

1. Brobdingnagian and lilliputian

2. diminuendo

3. magnum opus

4. exiguous

5. juggernaut

6. commodious/capacious

Lecture 31

1. Children in the alphabetic layer have a tacit logic underlying their spelling; they operate under the principle that every letter makes a sound and that we read and spell in a left-to-right, linear fashion; they have the same basic spelling logic as the Anglo-Saxons.

2. Children in the pattern layer know that every letter does not make a sound in English, that silent letters provide important information, and that the "one letter at a time" strategy won't work for all words.

3. Many of the classical roots in the meaning layer came into our spelling system during the Renaissance, when an explosion of new knowledge and ideas created a demand for new vocabulary.

Lecture 32

1. tendentious/equivocal

2. truculent/truckle

3. trenchant/nascent

4. venal

5. pernicious

6. tintinnabulation (ringing), susurration (whispering), and harrumph (throat-clearing)

Lecture 33

1. shy spy, straighter traitor, monk's bunk, quieter rioter

Lecture 34

1. schadenfreude/bête noire

2. weltschmerz/zeitgeist

3. éminence grise

4. doppelgänger

5. mugwump

Lecture 35

1. sangfroid

2. agent provocateur

3. gemütlichkeit

4. lagniappe

5. mot juste

6. cachet

7. gestalt

8. insouciant

Lecture 36

1. quarks

2. muggles/memes

3. peckish

4. sockdolager

5. profligate

6. feckless

7. evanescent

Glossary of Target Words

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
abdicate (verb)	to renounce or relinquish a throne, right, power, or responsibility	21
ablution (noun)	the washing of one's body, or part of it, especially as a religious ritual	21
abnegate (verb)	1. to deny or renounce 2. to relinquish power	21
abrogate (verb)	1. to abolish by formal, authoritative action; to annul, repeal 2. to treat as nonexistent; to do away with, set aside	25
absquatulate (verb)	to flee, abscond	21
acronym (noun)	a word or abbreviation formed from the initial letters of each of the successive or major parts of a compound term	28
acrophobia (noun)	abnormal fear of heights	9
adumbrate (verb)	1. to give a sketchy outline of; to suggest, disclose, or outline partially 2. to foreshadow vaguely; to intimate	13
agent provocateur (noun)	a secret agent hired to incite suspected persons to illegal action that will make them liable to punishment	35
agitprop (noun)	political propaganda delivered through art, music, drama, or literature	14
agoraphobia (noun)	abnormal fear of open or public spaces	9
alacrity (noun)	a quick and cheerful readiness and eagerness to do something	19
antediluvian (adjective)	1. of or relating to the period before the biblical flood 2. very old-fashioned, out of date, antiquated, or primitive	21
apocryphal (adjective)	of doubtful or dubious authenticity; false	3

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
apostate (noun)	a person who abandons his or her religion, political beliefs, principles, or cause	14
argot (noun)	a specialized language characteristic of a particular group of people	27
asperity (noun)	roughness or harshness of surface, sound, climate, condition, manner, or temper	22
avuncular (adjective)	1. of or having to do with an uncle 2. resembling an uncle; friendly; helpful; kind, patient, and indulgent	29
badinage (noun)	light, playful banter; raillery	16
banal (adjective)	lacking freshness and originality; trite; commonplace; so ordinary as to have become tedious	10
bedlam (noun)	a place or situation of noisy uproar and confusion	17
bellicose (adjective)	warlike, pugnacious, aggressively hostile	5
bête noire (noun)	a person or thing that is particularly disliked, dreaded, or avoided	34
billingsgate (noun)	foul, coarse, abusive language	17
blandishment (noun)	flattery that is designed to persuade a listener	12
bloviate (verb)	to talk pompously; to talk at great length in a pompous and boastful manner	12
bombast (noun)	pretentious, pompous, grandiloquent speech or writing	12
bowdlerize (verb)	to change a text by removing or modifying parts that could offend people	15
braggadocio (noun)	1. a braggart 2. empty, arrogant boasting	23
bravado (noun)	a pretentious, swaggering display of courage intended to impress others	23
Brobdingnagian (adjective)	immense, enormous	30
bromide (noun)	a platitude or trite saying	10
bumptious (adjective)	pushy; offensively or loudly self-assertive; cocky	12

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
bunk (noun)	foolish, untrue talk; nonsense	16
cabal (noun)	1. a small group of people secretly working together 2. a secret plot	20
cachet (noun)	superior status, privilege	35
caesura (noun)	a break or pause	25
callow (adjective)	immature or inexperienced; lacking adult sophistication	8
calumny (noun)	a false accusation maliciously intended to destroy someone's reputation	15
canoodle (verb)	1. to kiss and cuddle; pet, caress; fondle 2. to coax, persuade, cajole, wheedle	9
capacious (adjective)	capable of containing a great deal; spacious and roomy	30
captious (adjective)	faultfinding; hypercritical; difficult to please	6
castigate (verb)	to punish, rebuke, or criticize severely	6
chutzpah (noun)	personal confidence or courage; shameless audacity; impudence	23
circumlocution (noun)	evasive, long-winded rambling or indirect speech	6
circumspect (adjective)	cautious, prudent	2
claptrap (noun)	pretentious nonsense; insincere speech	16
cleave (verb)	1. to split or divide by cutting 2. to stick closely to; to cling to	20
clipped word (noun)	a word that has been shortened with no change in meaning	28
commodious (adjective)	comfortably or conveniently spacious; roomy	30
concatenation (noun)	a series of things that are linked together	20
contumacious (adjective)	stubbornly disobedient and rebellious to authority; willfully obstinate	5

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
coterie (noun)	a small, often select group of people who associate with one another frequently and share a common interest, background, or purpose	20
craven (adjective)	very cowardly; abjectly afraid	23
deduction (noun)	process of reasoning in which a conclusion necessarily follows from the stated premises	18
denude (verb)	to lay bare; to strip; to make nude	21
desuetude (noun)	a state of disuse or inactivity	25
detritus (noun)	disintegrated or eroded matter; debris	26
dialect (noun)	a variety of a language often associated with a certain region or social class	27
diaspora (noun)	the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland	20
didactic (adjective)	inclined to teach or moralize excessively	18
dilettante (noun)	a dabbler in the arts or some field of knowledge; often used in a pejorative sense	8
diminuendo (noun)	a decrease in loudness or intensity	30
discursive (adjective)	rambling from topic to topic, aimless, digressive	27
dishabille (noun)	a state of being dressed in a very casual or even careless, disheveled, and disorderly style	13
dissemble (verb)	to disguise or conceal behind a false appearance	14
dogmatic (adjective)	characterized by an authoritative, arrogant assertion of unproven ideas	14
donnybrook (noun)	a free-for-all; a brawl; a scene of disorder and uproar	5
doppelgänger (noun)	1. a ghostly double of a living person that haunts its living counterpart 2. someone who has a close, even eerily close, resemblance to another	34
draconian (adjective)	exceedingly harsh; very severe; cruel	17

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
éminence grise (noun)	1. a powerful decision maker or advisor who operates behind the scenes 2. an elder statesman or eminent senior member of a group	34
eponym (noun)	a word derived from a person's name	28
equivocal (adjective)	open to two or more interpretations, often with an intent to mislead or be purposely vague	14
ersatz (adjective)	describes an inferior substitute	3
erudite (adjective)	learned or scholarly; characterized by deep and extensive knowledge	18
esoteric (adjective)	understood by only a select group	18
evanescent (adjective)	1. fleeting, or short duration, vanishing or likely to vanish 2. fragile, diaphanous, and unsubstantial	36
execrate (verb)	1. to damn or denounce scathingly; curse 2. to detest utterly, abhor, abominate, loathe	9
exegesis (noun)	an explanation or critical interpretation, especially of the Bible or another religious text	18
exiguous (adjective)	excessively scanty, inadequate, and meager	30
extirpate (verb)	to pull up by the roots; to root out and destroy completely; to wipe out	25
facile (adjective)	done or achieved with little effort or difficulty; easy; performed with effortless ease and fluency	19
factitious (adjective)	1. made or manufactured; not natural 2. made up in the sense of contrived; a sham, fake, or phony	2
factotum (noun)	someone hired to do a variety of jobs; a jack-of-all-trades	1
feckless (adjective)	1. weak and ineffective 2. worthless, lazy, and irresponsible	36
fin de siècle (noun phrase)	end of the century	25

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
foment (verb)	to stir up, incite, rouse, provoke, inflame, encourage, or instigate	15
fortitude (noun)	mental and emotional strength in facing difficulty, adversity, danger, or temptation courageously	23
fractious (adjective)	unruly; hard to manage; rebellious	22
frisson (noun)	an almost pleasurable sensation of fright	26
fulminate (verb)	1. to issue a thunderous verbal attack; to vehemently denounce 2. to explode with sudden violence; to detonate	15
fulsome (adjective)	1. excessively or insincerely lavish 2. abundant	4
gadfly (noun)	1. a persistently annoying person who questions, critiques, and pesters 2. an insect that annoys livestock by biting and sucking their blood	4
gemütlichkeit (noun)	an atmosphere characterized by a cheerful mood; peace of mind, with the connotation of fellowship and coziness	35
gerrymander (noun/verb)	noun: the act of dividing election districts to give one party an unfair advantage verb: to divide election districts unfairly	17
gestalt (noun)	a pattern possessing qualities as a whole that cannot be described merely as a sum of its parts	35
glossophobia (noun)	unreasonable fear of speaking in public	9
Gordian knot (noun phrase)	an exceedingly complicated and intricate problem or deadlock; an intractable problem	11
halcyon (adjective)	tranquil, calm, and peaceful; may refer to happy, joyful, and prosperous times	5
harrumph (verb)	1. to make a pretentious show of clearing one's throat 2. to offer brief critical comments	32

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
Hobson's choice (noun phrase)	a choice between what is available and nothing; the absence of a real alternative	26
hoi polloi (noun)	the ordinary masses; the common people	10
homograph (noun)	one of two or more words that are spelled the same but have different pronunciations and meanings	28
homonym (noun)	one of two or more words that are spelled and pronounced the same but carry different meanings	28
homophone (noun)	one of two or more words that sound the same but are spelled differently and have different meanings	28
hornswoggle (verb)	to swindle, cheat, or dupe	3
hubris (noun)	excessive pride or self-confidence; arrogance	12
imbroglio (noun)	1. a state of great confusion and entanglement; a complicated, difficult, or embarrassing situation 2. a complex misunderstanding, disagreement, or dispute—sometimes of a bitter nature	5
importune (verb)	to harass with repeated requests; to demand of someone insistently	22
inchoate (adjective)	1. not completely formed or developed; only partly in existence 2. not organized; lacking order	8
indolent (adjective)	habitually lazy and slow; tending to avoid exertion	19
induction (noun)	process of inferring general principles from individual facts or instances	18
ingénue (noun)	1. an innocent, naïve girl or young woman 2. a stock innocent character in a movie or play or the actress playing such a character	8
insidious (adjective)	intended to entrap, ensnare, or beguile; stealthily treacherous or deceitful	7
insipid (adjective)	bland and lacking in flavor; lacking in interesting, exciting, or stimulating qualities	10

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
insouciant (adjective)	free from concern, worry, or anxiety; carefree; nonchalant	35
intrepid (adjective)	resolutely fearless, dauntless	23
inure (verb)	to become accustomed to hardship, difficulty, or pain; to toughen or harden; to habituate	22
invidious (adjective)	creating ill will, envy; causing resentment; unfairly or offensively discriminating	7
jargon (noun)	unintelligible or meaningless speech	27
jeremiad (noun)	a long lamentation or complaint; a bitter lament; a scolding speech or sermon	16
juggernaut (noun)	an overwhelming or unstoppable force that smashes everything in its path	30
laconic (adjective)	using few words, terse, brief, succinct, taciturn, concise	15
lacuna (noun)	a gap or hole where something should be	20
lagniappe (noun)	a small gift given by a storeowner to a customer; any small extra gift or benefit	35
lilliputian (adjective)	1. very small, diminutive 2. trivial, petty	30
lingua franca (noun)	a common language used by speakers of different languages to communicate	27
luddite (noun)	anyone who opposes the introduction of technological change	17
machinations (noun)	intrigues, plots, crafty schemes, or the act of plotting	3
magnum opus (noun)	an artist's greatest work	30
maladroit (adjective)	awkward, clumsy, tactless, or bungling	7
malaise (noun)	a vague or indefinite feeling of unease or discomfort	7
malapropism (noun)	a ridiculous and often humorous misuse of words, particularly words that sound similar but are different in meaning	17
malcontent (noun)	a person who is chronically dissatisfied	7
malediction (noun)	a curse; evil talk about someone; slander	7
malefactor (noun)	a criminal; a person who violates the law	7

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
malfeasance (noun)	an illegal or harmful act, usually committed by a public official, that violates the public trust	7
malinger (verb)	to fake or exaggerate illness, usually to avoid work	7
manumit (verb)	to release from slavery or servitude	13
maudlin (adjective)	foolishly, tearfully, and weakly sentimental; overly emotional	4
maunder (verb)	to talk aimlessly and incoherently	16
maw (noun)	the mouth, throat, or gullet of an animal, particularly a carnivorous animal	20
mawkish (adjective)	excessively and objectionably sentimental	4
meme (noun)	an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person in a culture	36
mercurial (adjective)	1. liable to sudden and unpredictable change; volatile; erratic 2. animated, lively, quick-witted	11
misanthrope (noun)	someone who hates and distrusts all people	9
mollycoddle (verb)	to overindulge; to treat with excessive attention to the point of spoiling someone	5
mordant (adjective)	bitingly sarcastic	29
moribund (adjective)	1. approaching death; coming to an end 2. no longer effective or active; stagnant; not progressing or advancing	8
mot juste (noun)	the exact, appropriate word or expression for a situation	35
mountebank (noun)	a flamboyant swindler; a flimflammer; someone who claims to be an expert but isn't	3
moxie (noun)	1. the ability to face difficulty with spirit and courage 2. aggressive energy, vigor, verge, and pep or skill and know-how	23
muggle (noun)	a person who lacks a particular skill or knowledge of a subject; someone who is regarded as inferior in some way	36

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
mugwump (noun)	1. a person, especially a politician, who is unable to make up his or her mind on an issue 2. a person who remains neutral or independent on a controversial issue	34
nascent (adjective)	emerging, developing, coming into existence, forming	8
nihilism (noun)	a belief in nothing	21
noisome (adjective)	offensive to the point of arousing disgust; foul, particularly in reference to an odor	4
nonpareil (adjective)	without peer; having no equal	10
obloquy (noun)	1. harshly critical speech or verbal abuse 2. the disgrace that results from such abuse	15
obsequious (adjective)	servile and fawning; overly deferential	12
oenophile (noun)	a connoisseur or lover of wine	9
officious (adjective)	marked by excessive, often aggressive eagerness in offering unwanted advice, service, or help to others; meddlesome	29
pablum (noun)	trite, insipid, or simplistic writing, speech, or conceptualization	16
paean (noun)	1. joyous song or hymn of praise, thanksgiving, or triumph 2. speech or writing that expresses enthusiastic praise	16
palaver (noun)	1. profuse and idle chit-chat; chatter; empty talk; nonsense 2. flattery and sweet talk used to persuade	16
panegyric (noun)	formal or elaborate praise; specifically, a formal speech or writing that praises	16
parricide (noun)	the murder of a parent or close relative	25

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
patrician (noun/adjective)	noun: 1. someone of refined upbringing, manners, and taste 2. an aristocrat; a person of high rank or social class adjective: people or things that have the characteristics of the upper class	10
peckish (adjective)	1. somewhat hungry 2. irritable, touchy	36
perdition (noun)	loss of the soul; eternal damnation; hell; utter ruin	25
perfidious (adjective)	treacherous, disloyal, and deceitful	14
pernicious (adjective)	exceedingly harmful or destructive; deadly	29
perspicacious (adjective)	having or showing keen mental perception	18
philatelist (noun)	a person who studies or collects stamps	9
philippic (noun)	a bitter verbal attack; a rant filled with harsh, cruel language	15
philistine (noun)	a person who is uninterested in intellectual pursuits and indifferent or hostile to artistic and cultural values	18
phlegmatic (adjective)	showing little emotion; not easily excited to action	22
pillory (verb)	to expose to (often public) ridicule, abuse, and scorn; to criticize harshly	16
piquant (adjective)	1. agreeably pungent or sharp in taste or flavor; pleasantly biting or tart; spicy 2. agreeably stimulating and engagingly provocative 3. interesting, charming attractive	29
pithy (adjective)	refers to language that is short and terse but meaningful	15
pontificate (verb)	to speak or express opinions in a pompous or dogmatic way	14

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
portmanteau word (noun)	a new word that is blended together from parts of existing words	28
prescient (adjective)	perceiving the significance of events before they happen	13
procrustean (adjective)	tending to produce conformity by arbitrary, ruthless, or violent means	1
profligate (noun)	someone who is given to wildly extravagant and grossly self-indulgent behavior	36
Promethean (adjective)	daringly original or creative; boldly inventive	11
propitiate (verb)	to appease; to make favorably inclined; to regain the favor of someone	5
prosaic (adjective)	1. dull, lacking in imagination, matter-of-fact 2. commonplace, everyday, ordinary	10
protean (adjective)	able to take many forms or do many different things; versatile	21
puerile (adjective)	juvenile, childishly silly, foolish	8
pusillanimous (adjective)	cowardly; lacking courage or resolution; fainthearted	23
quark (noun)	an elementary subatomic particle proposed as the fundamental unit of matter	36
querulous (adjective)	full of complaints; complaining in an annoyed way	4
quiescent (adjective)	tranquilly at rest, inactive, still, quiet, or motionless	5
quisling (noun)	a traitor who aids an invading and/or occupying enemy force, often serving later in the puppet government	17
quixotic (adjective)	romantically impractical or impulsive	17
quotidian (adjective)	daily, customary, ordinary, usual	10
rapacious (adjective)	aggressively and excessively greedy or grasping; predatory	5
recondite (adjective)	difficult to understand	18
salubrious (adjective)	conducive or favorable to health or well-being; wholesome	29
salutary (adjective)	producing a beneficial effect; remedial	29

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
sangfroid (noun)	coolness and composure, especially in trying circumstances	35
saturnalia (noun)	a celebration marked by unrestrained revelry and, often, promiscuity and excessive drinking	11
saturnine (adjective)	melancholy, sluggish, gloomy	11
scabrous (adjective)	1. scabby, blotchy, and scaly 2. rough to the touch 3. indecent, shocking, scandalous	4
schadenfreude (noun)	satisfaction, pleasure, or malicious joy at someone else's misfortune	34
schism (noun)	a division among the members of a group into opposing factions because of a disagreement	20
sedulous (adjective)	diligent in application or in the pursuit of something; persevering; constant in effort	19
sesquipedalian (adjective)	1. given to the overuse of long words 2. long and ponderous, polysyllabic	27
shibboleth (noun)	a test word, phrase, or custom used to distinguish one group from another	27
Sisyphean (adjective)	endlessly laborious and futile	11
skulduggery (noun)	devious, deceitful behavior; underhanded dealings	3
sobriquet (noun)	a nickname, usually a humorous or affectionate one	27
sockdolager (noun)	1. a strong, decisive, final blow; a finisher 2. something or someone outstanding or exceptional	36
solipsism (noun)	1. the philosophy that one has no valid reason for believing that anything exists except oneself 2. an extreme preoccupation with one's own feelings and thoughts	21
somniloquy (noun)	sleep talking	27
sophist (noun)	one skilled in elaborate and devious argumentation	3

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
specious (adjective)	having the ring of truth or plausibility but actually fallacious	3
splenetic (adjective)	bad-tempered, irritable, or spiteful	22
spoonerism (noun)	the transposition of the (usually) initial sounds of two or more words, often creating a humorous effect	28
spurious (adjective)	not genuine, authentic, or true; false	3
stoic (adjective)	seemingly indifferent to or unaffected by joy, grief, pleasure, or pain	22
stolid (adjective)	having or expressing little or no sensibility; unemotional	22
stultify (verb)	1. to cause to lose interest; to cause to feel dull and not alert 2. to render useless or ineffectual	26
supercilious (adjective)	feeling or showing haughty disdain; displaying arrogant pride, even scorn	12
supercilious (adjective)	having a holier-than-thou attitude	24
susurration (noun)	an indistinct whispering or rustling sound; a murmur	32
sword of Damocles (noun phrase)	a constant and imminent peril; an impending disaster	11
sycophant (noun)	a servile, self-seeking flatterer	12
temerity (noun)	reckless boldness; rashness; foolhardy disregard of danger	23
tendentious (adjective)	marked by or favoring a particular point of view; showing a definite tendency, bias, or purpose; partisan	32
timorous (adjective)	fearful or timid	23
tintinnabulation (noun)	a ringing, tinkling, or jingling sound, particularly the sound of bells	32
toothsome (adjective)	delicious; sexually attractive	6
toponym (noun)	1. a place-name 2. a word named after a place	28
torpid (adjective)	slow, sluggish, lethargic, dull, benumbed	19

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
torpor (noun)	sluggishness; a state of mental or physical inactivity; lethargy, apathy	19
treacle (noun)	cloying, sickly-sweet speech or sentiment	4
trenchant (adjective)	forceful and clear; penetrating, keen, and incisive	32
truckle (verb)	1. to submit; to be servile and submissive 2. to fawn; to curry favor by flattering	32
truculent (adjective)	cruel, savage, brutal, and fierce; disposed to fighting; scathing and brutally harsh, often referring to verbal criticism	5
turbid (adjective)	1. muddy, thick, or opaque with sediment; obscured; clouded 2. confused, muddled, disordered	19
turgid (adjective)	swollen, distended, puffy	19
turpitude (noun)	baseness, depravity, or debauchery	7
tyro (noun)	a beginner or novice	8
unctuous (adjective)	characterized by affected, exaggerated, or insincere earnestness	12
vapid (adjective)	completely lacking in zest, spirit, animation, and liveliness	10
venal (adjective)	open to corruption; capable of being bought through bribery	7
vernacular (noun)	form of a language spoken by the common people, as opposed to the learned and literary	27
vilify (verb)	to attack someone's reputation with strong or abusive criticism; to malign	15
virulent (adjective)	1. extremely infectious, malignant, poisonous, or deadly 2. bitterly hostile, antagonistic, or spiteful; hateful	29
vivisection (noun)	the cutting of, or operation on, a living animal, usually for scientific research	25
weltschmerz (noun)	sadness over the evils of the world	34

Target Word and Part of Speech	Definition	Lecture No.
wheedle (verb)	to attempt to persuade with beguiling flattery and smooth talking	12
xenophobia (noun)	unreasonable hatred or fear of foreigners or strangers; fear of that which is foreign or strange	9
zeitgeist (noun)	the spirit, attitude, or general outlook of a specific period; the moral, cultural, and intellectual climate of an era	34

Bibliography

General References

Ayers, Donald M. *English Words from Latin and Greek Elements*. 2nd ed., revised by Thomas Worthen. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1986. Outstanding resource that shows readers how to "crack the code" of Latin and Greek affixes and roots that underlies English vocabulary. This book clearly explains the word formation processes of English vocabulary through a series of lessons.

Ayto, John. *Dictionary of Word Origins: The Histories of More Than 8,000 English Language Words*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011. A valuable etymological resource. Clearly details the origin and development of words and makes historical connections between words, including "unlikely relatives" such as *espouse* and *sponsor*.

Barnhart, Robert K., ed. *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology: The Origins and Development of over 30,000 English Words*. London: Chambers Harrap Publishers, 2010. Previously published as the *Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*, this extensive reference work takes us back to the roots of thousands of English vocabulary words, including their Latin, Greek, and Indo-European sources.

Bear, Donald R., Marcia Invernizzi, Shane Templeton, and Francine Johnston. *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction*. 5th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2012. Targeted for educators, this is the book that put developmental word study on the map in literacy education. If you're interested in exploring the three layers of the English spelling system, this is your book.

Beck, Isabel L., Margaret G. McKeown, and Linda Kucan. *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. New York: Guilford, 2002. Targeted for K–12 educators, this is one of the best books explaining how to teach

vocabulary effectively I've ever read. Drawing on their own research and experience, the authors present a practical, research-based plan for vocabulary instruction.

Blachowicz, Camille, and Peter J. Fisher. *Teaching Vocabulary in All Classrooms*. Boston: Pearson, 2010. Excellent resource for K–12 educators that provides a comprehensive framework for vocabulary instruction and many practical, research-based strategies.

Crutchfield, Roger S. *English Vocabulary Quick Reference: A Comprehensive Dictionary Arranged by Word Roots*. Leesburg, VA: LexaDyne Publishing, 2009. A straightforward, handy reference to the meanings of roots and their derived words in English. The words are organized by both root and key word.

Crystal, David. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Crystal covers a vast amount of information about numerous aspects of the English language.

Dale, Edgar, and Joseph O'Rourke. *Vocabulary Building*. Columbus, OH: Zaner-Bloser, 1986. The source for the authors' oft-cited four levels of word knowledge.

Green, Tamara M. *The Greek and Latin Roots of English*. 4th ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008. Organized thematically by such topics as psychology and medicine, this fine resource helps build vocabulary knowledge through the study of Latin and Greek roots.

McKeown, Margaret G., Isabel L. Beck, Richard C. Omanson, and Martha T. Pople. "Some Effects of the Nature and Frequency of Vocabulary Instruction on the Knowledge and Use of Words." *Reading Research Quarterly* 20 (1985): 522–535. This seminal study of school-age children found evidence for the effectiveness of rich and extended vocabulary instruction, including the finding that it takes 12 encounters with a target word to improve comprehension of a passage containing that word.

Merriam-Webster. *The Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories: Fascinating Stories about Our Living, Growing Language.* Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1991. Of all the etymological sources I consulted, this one provides the most in-depth treatment of word histories, some entries taking a full page or two. At turns fascinating and enlightening, it takes you down the twists and turns of the semantic biography of each word. An invaluable resource for many of the word histories explored in this course.

———. *Merriam Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms*. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1984. A must have for any writer grasping for that "just right" word. Considers clusters of closely related words, such as *fortitude*, *grit*, *backbone*, and *pluck*; discusses the common meaning they all share; clearly explains the nuances of meaning that differentiate them; and illustrates them with both classic and contemporary usage examples. Immediately cracked my top-five desk references and has become a go-to gift for fellow word lovers.

Miller, George A., and Patricia M. Gildea. "How Children Learn Words." *Scientific American* 257, no. 3 (1987): 94–99. An important study of school-age children demonstrating that there is much more to knowing a word than just definition-level knowledge.

Nagy, William E., and Richard C. Anderson. "How Many Words Are There in Printed School English?" *Reading Research Quarterly* 19 (1984): 304–330. Seminal study referenced in Lecture 2. The authors estimate the number of distinct words in printed school English, estimate the vocabulary of a high school graduate, and hypothesize that the amount one reads accounts for the majority of vocabulary growth from approximately third grade on. This classic article is still regularly cited today.

Read, Charles. "Pre-School Children's Knowledge of English Phonology." *Harvard Educational Review* 41, no. 1 (1971): 1–34. Read's groundbreaking work provided the key to unlocking the tacit logic underlying young children's invented spellings.

Schleifer, Robert. *Grow Your Vocabulary by Learning the Roots of English Words*. New York: Random House, 1995. An excellent vocabulary-building

resource that leverages the power of high-utility roots to increase vocabulary knowledge. Part IV, "How English Words Are Created: A Short Course," is worth the price of the book for those interested in how Latin and Greek roots combine to form English words.

Stahl, Steven A., and William E. Nagy. *Teaching Word Meanings*. Mawhah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2006. An essential book in any vocabulary educator's library and one I'm constantly referencing. Does a masterful job explaining the complex nature of vocabulary knowledge, how we learn vocabulary, and how to best teach vocabulary. Top-notch synthesis of vocabulary research and its implications for teaching and learning.

Templeton, Shane, Donald R. Bear, Marcia Invernizzi, Francine Johnston, Kevin Flanigan, Dianna R. Townsend, Lori Helman, and Latisha Hayes. *Vocabulary Their Way: Word Study with Middle and Secondary Students*. 2nd ed. Boston: Pearson, 2015. Targeted for middle and high school teachers, this book focuses on three major aspects of vocabulary instruction: context based, word specific, and generative morphology. This was a major source for many of the central concepts and teaching ideas in this course, including the spelling-meaning connection, the related words strategy, and the treatment and selection of affixes and roots.

Willingham, Daniel T. *Why Don't Students Like School? A Cognitive Scientist Answers Questions about How the Mind Works and What It Means for the Classroom.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009. The best text I've read that clearly explains the findings of cognitive science and translates them into implications for all levels of instruction. If you're interested in exploring the research base underlying many of the leaning principles in this course, such as making knew-to-known connections and the power of stories, this is the book.

Dictionaries

American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. 5th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011. An excellent dictionary with rich etymological information. Includes appendices of Indo-European and Semitic roots for those interested in delving deeply into word histories.

Unlike some dictionaries, which list a word's different meanings in historical order, this dictionary orders them by the central or most commonly sought meaning first, which is useful information for writers and students. An online version is available.

Dictionary.com. Extremely useful online dictionary that identifies each word's affixes and roots.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2014. A valuable and handy desk reference. An online version is available.

Onelook.com. This comprehensive dictionary website provides links to many well-respected online dictionaries. Includes a reverse dictionary and a search tool that allows you to find words that contain specific spelling patterns, affixes, and roots.

Online Etymology Dictionary (etymonline.com). This is often my first stop when exploring the history of a word. Provides clear, succinct etymological information.

Oxford English Dictionary (online version). Considered by many the definitive dictionary of the English language. The best source for tracing the history of a word from its first known usage in English to the present. You may be able to access the OED online free through your public library.

Vocabulary.com. An excellent dictionary website that provides accessible, clear definitions using engaging and often humorous contexts and examples. Provides multiple usage examples for vocabulary words, which is invaluable for getting a sense of how to actually use a word in context.