

# Stylistic Classification of English Vocabulary

Oniani T. G

Professor, Moscow Avenue 38 Floor-8.Room 174, Tbilisi, Georgia 0137

**Abstract:** *The aim of the work is to speak about of the stylistic classification of English vocabulary. Like any linguistic issues the classification of the vocabulary here suggested is for purely stylistic purposes. This is important for the course is as much as some SD-s are based on the interplay of different stylistic aspects of words. The common literary, neutral and common colloquial words are grouped under the terms STANDARD ENGLISH VOCABULARY. Indeed, the coinage of new lexical units, the development of meaning, the differentiation of words according to their stylistic evaluation and their spheres of usage systematic character of the word-stock of a language amounts to denying the systematic character of language as a whole, words being elements in the general system of language.*

**Keywords:** language, stylistic, English, vocabulary, synonyms, literary, special, alternation, phenomenon, word, process, interesting, term, science, interesting, relevance, immediately, society, terminology, ordinary, aspect

## 1. General Consideration

Like any linguistic issue the classification of the vocabulary here suggested is for purely stylistic purposes. This is important for the course inasmuch as some SDs are based on the interplay of different stylistic aspects of words. It follows then that a discussion of the ways the English vocabulary can be classified from a stylistic point of view should be given proper attention.

In order to get a more or less clear idea of the word-stock of any language, it must be presented as a system, the elements of which are interconnected, interrelated and yet independent. Some linguists, who clearly see the systematic character of language as a whole, deny, however, the possibility of systematically classifying the vocabulary. They say that the word-stock of any language is so large and so heterogeneous that it is impossible to formalize it and therefore present it in any system. The words of a language are thought of as a chaotic body whether viewed from their origin and development or from their present state.

Indeed, the coinage of new lexical units, the development of meaning, the differentiation of words according to their stylistic evaluation and their spheres of usage, the correlation between meaning and concept and other problems connected which vocabulary are so multifarious and varied that it is difficult to grasp the systematic character of the word-stock of a language, though it co – exists with the systems of other levels – phonetics, morphology and syntax.

To deny the systematic character of the word-stock of a language amounts to denying the systematic character of language as a whole, words being elements in the general system of language.

The word-stock of a language may be represented as a definite system in which different aspects of words may be single out as interdependent.

A special branch of linguistic science – lexicology-has done much to classify vocabulary. A glance at the connects of any book on lexicology will suffice to ascertain the outline of the system of the word-stock of the given language.

For our purpose, i.e. for linguistics, a special type of classification, with stylistic classification, is most important.

In accordance with the already – mentioned division of language into literary and colloquial, we may represent the whole of the word-stock

- 1) Special literary vocabulary – Terms - Archaic words- Poetical words- Nonce words – Foreignisms and Barbarisms
- 2) Common literary vocabulary – Neutral words- English vocabulary-Standard
- 3) Common colloquial vocabulary- Special colloquial vocabulary (non-literary) – Professionalisms – Nonce words-Slang – Dialectal words –jargon- vulgarisms.

Of the English language as being divided into three main layers: the literary layer, the neutral layer an colloquial layer. The literary and the colloquial layers contain a number of subgroups each of which has a property it shares with all the subgroups within the layer. This common property, which unites the different groups of words within the layer, may be called its aspect. The aspect of the literary layer is its markedly bookish character. It is this that makes the layer more or less stable. The aspect of the colloquial layer of words is its lively spoken character. It is this that makes is unstable, fleeting.

The aspect of the neutral layer is its universal character. That means it is unrestricted in its use. It can be employed in all styles of language and in all spheres of human activity. It is this that makes the layer the most stable of all.

The literary layer of words consists f groups accepted as legitimate members of the English vocabulary. They have no local or dialectal character.

The colloquial layer of words as qualified in most English or American dictionaries is at infrequently limited to a definite language community or confined to special locality where it circulates.

The literary vocabulary consists of the following groups of words:1. Co m mo n literary; 2. Terms and learned word; 3. Poetic words; 4. Archaic words;5. barbarisms and foreign words; 6. Literary coinages Including nonce-words.

The colloquial vocabulary falls into the following groups: 1. Common colloquial words; 2. Slang; 3. Jargonizes; 4. Professional words; 5. Dialectal words; 6. Vulgar words; 7. Colloquial coinages.

The common literary, neutral and common colloquial words are grouped under the term STANDARD ENGLISH VOCABULARY. Other groups in the literary layer are regarded as special literary vocabulary and those in the colloquial layer are regarded as special colloquial (non-literary) vocabulary. The accompanying diagram on illustrates this classification graphically.

**NEUTRAL, COMMON LITERARY AND COMMON COLLOQUIAL VOCABULARY**

NEUTRAL WORDS, which form the bulk of the English vocabulary, are used in both literary and colloquial language. Neutral words are the main source of synonymy and polysemy. It is the neutral stock of words that is so prolific in the production of new meanings.

The wealth of the neutral stratum of words is often overlooked. This is due to their inconspicuous character. But their faculty for assuming new meanings and generating new stylistic variants is often quite amazing. This generative power of the neutral words in the English language is multiplied by the very nature of the language itself. It has been estimated that most neutral English words are of monosyllabic character, as, in the process of development from Old English to Modern English, most of the parts of speech lost their distinguishing suffixes. This phenomenon has led to the development of conversion as the most productive means of word-building. Word compounding is not so productive as conversion or word derivation, where a new word is formed because of a shift in the part of speech in the first case and by the addition of an affix in the second. Unlike all other groups, the neutral group of words cannot be considered as having a special stylistic coloring, whereas both literary and colloquial words have a definite stylistic coloring.

COMMON LITERARY WORDS are chiefly used in writing and in polished speech. One can always tell a literary word from a colloquial word. The reason for this lies in certain objective features of the literary layer of words. What these objective criteria have been worked out. But one of them undoubtedly is that literary units stand in opposition to colloquial units. This is especially apparent when pairs of synonyms, literary and colloquial, can be formed which stand in contrasting relation.

The following synonyms illustrate the relations that exist between the neutral, literary and colloquial words in the English language.

Colloquial	Neutral	Literary
kid	Child	infant
daddy	Father	parent
chap	Fellow	associate
get out	go away	retire
go on	Continue	proceed
teenager	boy(girl)	youth( maiden)
flapper	young (girl)	maiden
get going	Start	commence

It goes without saying that these synonyms are not only stylistic but ideographic as well, i.e. there is a definite, though slight, semantic difference between the words. But this is almost always the case with synonyms. There are very few absolute synonyms in English just as there are very few absolute synonyms in English just as there are in any language. The main distinction between synonyms remains stylistic. But stylistic difference may be of various kinds: it may lie in the emotional tension connoted in a word, or in the sphere of application, or in the degree of the quality denoted. Colloquial words are always more emotionally colored than literary ones. The neutral stratum of words, as the term itself implies, has no degree of emotiveness, nor have they any distinctions in the sphere of usage.

Both literary and colloquial words have their upper and lower ranges. The lower range of literary words approaches the neutral layer and has a markedly obvious tendency to pass into that layer. The same may be said of the upper range of colloquial layer: It can very easily pass into the neutral layer. The lines of demarcation between common colloquial and neutral, on the one hand, and common literary and neutral, on the other, are blurred. It is here that the process of interpenetration of the stylistic strata becomes most apparent.

Still the extremes remain antagonistic and therefore are often used to bring about a collision of manners of speech for special stylistic purposes. The difference in the stylistic aspect of words may colour the whole of an utterance.

In this example from "Fanny's First Play" (show), the difference between the common literary and common colloquial vocabulary is clearly seen.

"DORA: oh, I've let it out. Have I? (Contemplating juggling approvingly as he places a chair for her between the table and sideboard). But he's the right sort: I can see that (buttonholing him) you won't let it out downstairs, old man, will you?"

JUGGINS: the family can rely on my absolute discretion."

The words in Juggins answer are on the border-line between common literary and neutral, whereas the words and expressions used by Dora are clearly common colloquial, not bordering on neutral.

This example from "DAVID COPPERFIELD" (Dickens) illustrates the use of literary English words which do not border on neutral:

"My dear Copperfield," said Mr. Micawber, "this is luxurious. This is way of life which reminds me of a period when I was myself in a state of celibacy, and Mrs. Micawber had not yet been solicited to plight her faith to the Hymeneal altar".

"He means, solicited by him, Mr. Copperfield," said Mrs. Micawber, archly. "He cannot answer for others."

"My dear Copperfield," said Mr. Micawber, "this is luxurious. This is a way of life which reminds me of a

period when I was myself in a state of celibacy, and Mrs. Micawber has not yet been solicited to plight her faith at the humanly altar”.

“He means, solicited by him, Mr. Copperfield,” said Mrs. Micawber, archly. “He cannot answer for others”.

“My dear, returned Mr. Micawber with sudden seriousness, “I have no desire to answer for others. I am too well aware that when, in the inscrutable depress of Fate, you were reserved for one destined, after a protracted struggle, at length to fall a victim to pecuniary involvements of a complicated nature. I understand your allusion, my love, I regret it, but I can bear it.”

“Micawber!” exclaimed Mrs. Micawber, in tears. “Have I deserved this!” I, who never have deserted you; who never will desert you, Micawber!”.

“My love “, said Mr. Micawber, much affected, “you will forgive, and our old and tried friend Copperfield will, I am sure, forgive the momentary laceration of a wounded spirit, made sensitive by a recent collision with the minion of Power – in other words, with a ribald Turncock attached to the waterworks- and will pity, not condemn, its excesses.”

There is a certain analogy between the interdependence of common literary words and neutral ones, on the one hand, and common colloquial words and neutral ones, on the other. Both sets can be viewed as being in invariant – variant relations. The neutral vocabulary may be viewed as the invariant of the standard English vocabulary. The stock of words for meaning the neutral stratum should in this case be regarded as an abstraction. The words of this stratum are generally deprived of any concrete association and refer to the concept more or less directly. Synonyms of neutral words, both colloquial and literary, assume a far greater degree of concreteness. They generally present the same notions not abstractly but as a more or less concrete image, that is, in a form perceptible by the senses. This perceptibility by the senses causes subjective evaluations of the notion in question, or a mental image of the concept. Sometimes an impact of a definite kind on the reader or hearer is the aim lying behind the choice of a colloquial or a colloquial or a literary word rather than a neutral one.

Common colloquial vocabulary is represented as overlapping into the standard English vocabulary and is therefore to be considered part of it. It borders both on the neutral vocabulary and on the special colloquial vocabulary which, as we shall see later, falls at of standard English altogether. Just as common literary words lack homogeneity so do common colloquial words and set expressions. Some of the lexical items belonging to this stratum are close to the non- standard colloquial groups such as jargonisms, professionalisms etc. These are on the border – line between the common colloquial or non – standard vocabulary. Other words approach the neutral bulk of the English vocabulary. Thus, the words teenager (a young person who leads an unordered and unconventional life) are colloquial words passing into the neutral vocabulary. They are gradually losing their non – standard character and becoming widely recognized. However, they have not lost their colloquial

association and therefore still remain in the colloquial stratum of the English vocabulary. So also are the following words and expressions: take (in’ as I take it’ = as I understand); to go for (to be attracted by, like very much, as in “you think she still goes for the guy?) guy (young man) to be gone on (= to be madly in love with); pro (= a professional, e.g. a professional boxer, tennis- player, etc).

The spoken language abounds in set expression which are colloquial in character, e.g. all sorts of things, just a bit how is life treating you?, so-so, what time do you make it? To hob- nob 9 = to be very friendly with to drink together), so much the better to be sick and tired of, to be up to something.

The stylistic function of the different strata of the English vocabulary depends not so much on the inner qualities of each of the groups, as on their interaction when they are opposed to one another. However, the qualities themselves are not unaffected by the function of the words, inasmuch as these qualities have been acquired in certain environments. It is interesting to note that anything written assumes a greater degree of significance than what is only spoken. If the spoken takes the place of the written or vice versa, it means that we are faced with a stylistic device.

Certain set expressions have been coined within literary English and their use in ordinary speech will inevitably make the utterance sound bookish. In other words, it will become literary. The following are examples of set expressions which can be considered literary: in accordance with, with regard to, by virtue of, to speak at great length, to lend assistance, to draw a lesson, responsibility rest.

## 2. Special Literary Vocabulary

### Terms

“All scientists are linguists to some extent. They are responsible for devising a consistent terminology, a skeleton language to talk about their subject-matter. Philologists and philosophers of speech are in the peculiar position of having to evolve a special language to talk about language itself”.

This quotation makes clear one of the essential characteristics of a term, viz. Its highly conventional character. A term is generally very easily coined and easily accepted; and new coinages as easily replace out – dated ones.

This sensitivity to alteration is mainly due to the necessity of reflecting different concepts and phenomena. One of the most characteristic features of a term is its direct relevance to the system or set of terms used in a particular science, discipline or art, i.e. to its nomenclature.

When a term is used our mind immediately associates it with a certain nomenclature. A term is directly connected with the concept it denotes. A term, unlike other words, directs the mind to the essential quality of the thing, phenomenon or action as seen by the scientist in the light of his own conceptualization.

“A word is organically one with its meaning; likewise a term is one with a concept. Conceptualization leaves, as it were, language behind, although the words remain as (scientific or philosophical) term. Linguistically the difference is important in that terms are much more easily substitutable by other terms than are words by other words: it is easier to replace, say, the term phonology by phonemics (provided I make it clear what is meant), than to replace everyday words like table and chair by other words”

Terms are mostly and predominantly used in special works dealing with the notions of some branch of science. Therefore it may be said that they belong to the style of language of science. But their use is not confined to this style. they may as well appear in other styles- in newspaper style, in publicist and practically in all other existing styles of language. But their function in this case changes. They do not always fulfill their basic function –and also by the fact that the writer himself is a physician and finds it natural that of bearing exact reference to a given concept. When used in the belles- letters style, for instance, a term may acquire a stylistic function and consequently become a (sporadic) SD. This happens when a term is used in such a way that two meanings are materialized simultaneously.

The function of terms, if encountered in other styles, is either to indicate the technical peculiarities of the subject dealt with, or to make some reference to the occupation of a character whose language would naturally contain special words and expressions. In this connection it is interesting to analyse the stylistic effect of the medical terminology used by A.J.Cronin in his novel “The Citadel”. The frequent use of medical terms in the novel is explained by its subject-matter-the life of a physician–and also by the fact that the writer himself is a physician and finds it natural terminology.

The piling up of difficult and special terms hinders the reader’s understanding of the text if he is not a specialist even when the writer strives to explain them. Moreover, such an accumulation of special terminology often suggests that the author is displaying his erudition.

There is an interesting process going on in the development of any language. With the increase of general education and expansion of technique to satisfy the ever-growing needs and desires of mankind, many words that were once terms have gradually lost their quality as terms and have passed into the common literary or even neutral vocabulary. This process may be called “de-terminization”. Such words as ‘radio’, ‘television’ and the like have long been in common use and their terminological character is no longer evident. Brian Foster in his book “The Changing English Language” writes: “...science is one of the most powerful influences molding the English language into fresh shapes at the present time. Scientific writing is not highly esteemed for its elegance – one recalls the tale of the scientist who alluded to a certain domain of enquiry as a ‘virgin field pregnant with possibilities’-but scientific jargon and modes of thought inevitably come to the fore in a society which equates civilization with chromium-plated bath taps. Nor does the process date from yesterday, for we have long been talking of people being ‘galvanized’ into activity or going

‘full steam ahead’, but, nowadays this tendency to prefer technical imagery is ever-increasing, so that science can truly be said to have ‘sparked off a chain-reaction’ in the linguistic sphere” This quotation clearly shows how easily terms and terminological combinations become de-terminized. We hardly notice sometimes the terminological origin of the words we use. But such de-terminized which in their terminological function, thus assuming a twofold application, which is the feature required of a stylistic device. But when terms are used in their normal function as terms in a work of belles-letters, they are or ought to be easily understood from the context so that the desired effect in depicting the situation will be secured. Here is an example of a moderate use of special terminology bordering on common literary vocabulary.

“There was a long conversation-a long wait. His father came back to say it was doubtful whether they could make the loan. Eight per cent, then being secured, was a small rate of interest, considering its need. For ten per cent Mr. Kuzel might make a call-loan. Frank went back to his employer, whose commercial choler rose at the report”. Such terms as ‘loan’, ‘rate of interest’, and phrase ‘to secure for money’ are widely known financial terms which to the majority of the English and American reading public need no explanation. The terms used here do not bear any special meaning. Moreover, if they are not understood they may to some extent be neglected. It will suffice if the reader has a general idea, vague though it may be, of the actual meaning of the terms used. The main task of the writer in this passage is not to explain the process of a business negotiations, but to create the environment of a business atmosphere. In this example the terms retain their ordinary meaning though their function in the text is not exactly terminological. It is more nearly stylistic, in as much as here terms serve the purpose of characterizing the commercial spirit of the hero of the novel. However, they are not SDs because they fail to meet the main requirement of an SD. The following is an example where a term is used as an SD.

“What a fool Rawdon Crawley has been” Clump replied “to go and marry a governess. There was something about the girl too ”Green eyes, fair skin, pretty figure, famous frontal development, ” Squill remarked (W.M.Thackeray)

The combination ‘frontal development’ is terminological in character. But being preceded by the word ‘famous’ used in the sense indicated by the Shorter Oxford Dictionary as “a strong expression of approval, excellent, capital the ‘whole expression assumes a specific stylistic function due to the fact that frontal development’ is used both in its terminological aspect and in its logical meaning ‘the breast of a woman’. Whenever the terms used in the belles-lettres style set the reader at odds with the text, we can register a stylistic effect caused either by a specific use of terms in their proper meanings or by a simultaneous realization of two meanings.

## References

- [1] Ullman, Stephen, Words and Their use. Frederick Miller MSN 1951 p. 107

- [2] Verhaar John A.M. Proceedings of the Month International Congress of Linguistic. The HAGUE 1966 p. 378
- [3] Foster Brain the Changing English Language. Pengun Books, 1971 p. 12
- [4] Barfield Owen Poetic Fiction, LDN 1952 2-nd edition (cit, from Princeton Encyclopedia of poetry and poetics Princeton, 1969 p 628)
- [5] McKnight, G.H. Op. cit p 390
- [6] McKnight, G.H. Op. cit p 509
- [7] Galperin I. R