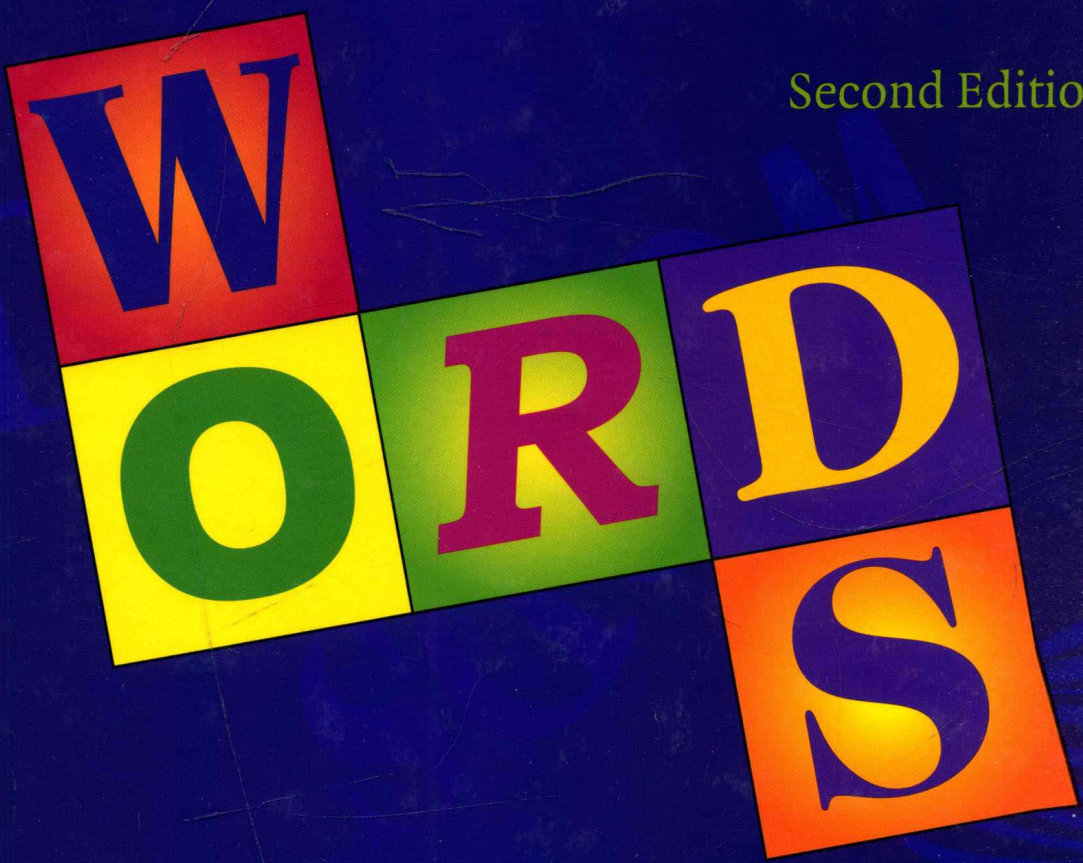
English Words

History and Structure

Donka Minkova and Robert Stockwell

Second Edition



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English Words

This new edition is concerned primarily with the learned vocabulary of English – the words borrowed from the classical languages. It surveys the historical events that define the layers of vocabulary in English, introduces some of the basic principles of linguistic analysis, and is a helpful manual for vocabulary discernment and enrichment. An online workbook contains readings, exercises, and root lists accompanying each chapter to strengthen knowledge acquired in the classroom.

New to this edition:

- Updated with a discussion of the most recent trends of blending and shortening associated with texting and other forms of electronic communication.
- Includes a new classification of the types of allomorphy.
- Discusses important topics such as segment sonority and the historical shifting of long vowels in English.
- Includes a new section on Grimm's Law, explaining some of the more obscure links between Germanic and classical cognates.

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Wittgenstein: “The limits of my language are the limits of my world.”

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Preface to the second edition and acknowledgements

This is a completely revised version of *English Words*. We reorganized and expanded the material on word-origins in Chapter 1, updating it with references to the most recent trends of blending and shortening associated with texting and other forms of electronic communication. Our chapters on the morphological composition and phonetic structure of English are also rewritten and updated, and now include a new classification of the types of allomorphy, as well as discussions of important topics such as segment sonority and the historical shifting of long vowels in English. Revisions in Chapters 6 and 7 will provide more information and clarify obscure points concerning the word-formation rules. Chapter 8 has a new section on Grimm's Law, explaining some of the deep historical allomorphic links between Germanic and Latinate cognates. Our discussion of semantic change, in Chapter 9, was reorganized and significantly enriched. Chapter 10 contains new sections on syllable division and syllable weight, leading to a more principled account of the stress-rules of the loan vocabulary of English. The Appendix, which contains all root morphemes from the Workbook and the affixes in Chapter 5, has been thoroughly revised.

This second edition is also accompanied by a Workbook arranged to correspond to the chapters in the textbook. All Workbook exercises and root lists have been revised and updated; many new exercises have been added. The link to the Workbook includes a special chapter on recently borrowed words from both ancient and modern languages, and one on technical vocabulary in law and medicine. The Workbook is available on the Cambridge University Press website.

Since the appearance of the first edition in 2001, we have had the benefit of comments and suggestions by many colleagues and reviewers, for which we are very grateful. Henry Ansgar (Andy) Kelly returned our present (a copy of the book) with extensive corrections throughout. Among the colleagues who used the book and wrote back to us, we want to thank Thomas Cobb, Karl Hagen, Anahita Jamshidi, and especially Barbara Blankenship. Philip Durkin generously shared his research with us. Jared Klein's detailed criticism of the book made us much more aware of the potential for errors – we hope that all of the ones that he pointed out have now been eliminated. At UCLA several generations of TAs have helped us identify obscure passages and shortcomings. For this we thank Helen Choi, Mac Harris, Jesse Johnson, Dorothy Kim, Meg Lamont, Tom O'Donnell, Emily Runde, Jennifer Smith. Sherrylyn Branchaw helped greatly by both sharing her

classroom experiences and by working with us on extensive corrections in the Morpheme Appendix and the Workbook exercises. We also gratefully acknowledge the support of the UCLA Research Council for facilitating the work that led to the inclusion of new material in the second edition. At Cambridge University Press we owe special thanks to Kate Brett who initiated both editions and to Helen Barton whose help with the current project we appreciate greatly.

Donka Minkova
Robert Stockwell
March 31, 2008

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An introduction to the textbook

This book is about the sources of English words, about their etymology and history, about their sound-structure, and about some formal properties of English word-formation rules. It is important to realize, however, that it is not about *all* possible origins, it is not about *all* the ways in which English has introduced new words into the language, but rather it is primarily about a particular subset, that portion of the vocabulary which is borrowed from the classical languages (Latin and Greek) either directly, or indirectly through French.

This (very large) portion of our vocabulary is a familiar subject. Greek and Latin roots in the English language have been studied and have been part of the core educational curriculum at least since the Renaissance. Departments of Classical Languages traditionally offer courses under titles like "Classical Roots in English," and in the past a decent education necessarily included a full program in the classics. In the twenty-first century, however, it is extremely rare for students entering college to have a clear idea even of what Latin is – some ancient language, perhaps –, or whether English is derived from it or not, and even what it means for a language to be "derived," in any sense, from another. The word *cognate* is not only generally unknown to undergraduate students, it often remains conceptually obscure, because it is simply not one of the topics we grow up with these days.

We take the view that people cannot call themselves "educated" who do not have a minimal acquaintance with the history and structure of the words in their own language. It doesn't take much: if you are a word-lover and use a dictionary a lot, you will probably find much that is familiar in this book. But people don't usually use a dictionary to do more than settle an argument about spelling, pronunciation, or origin. It should be used for *much* more. Learning to appreciate those additional uses is one of the benefits we hope to provide to our readers.

Another benefit is learning to appreciate relationships between words that even the best dictionaries don't always make clear. These relationships are part of what linguists call *morphology*. Morphology, which addresses the patterns of word-formation and change, is not a very "regular" part of language. The forms that words take is largely the legacy of history, whereas both the sound structure of language and its syntactic organization are probably innate, for the most part.

A question which everyone wonders about, and often asks of instructors, is "How many words does English have?" And even more commonly, "How many words does the typical educated person know, approximately?" There is no

verifiable answer to this question. We can tell you how many headwords a given dictionary has (or claims to have), or how many words Shakespeare used in his plays (because it is a closed corpus of texts, and we can count the number of different words – about 21,000 if you count *play, plays, playing, played* as a single word, and all similar cases, almost 30,000 if you don't). A very generous estimate of the vocabulary of a really well-educated adult is that it may reach up to 100,000 words, but this is a wildly unverifiable estimate. We can quote the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s statistics on the number of main entries: 231,100 (http://dictionary.oed.com/about/facts.html), but that figure is not particularly meaningful because it includes ancient as well as modern words, and most of the ancient words are unknown to us. They are obsolete and of antiquarian interest only.

One thing is certain: well over 80 percent of the total vocabulary of English is borrowed. The more we know about the sources and processes of linguistic borrowing, the better our chances of coping with technical vocabulary and educated usage in general.

An introduction to dictionaries

To use this book, one must have easy access to a good dictionary. Let us therefore start by asking, what makes a dictionary good? This prompts further questions: how did such books come into being? How do we get the most out of them?

All the major dictionaries of English are available in electronic form. The advantage of an electronic version is that it can be updated frequently, it allows easy cross-referencing, it allows complex searches on dates, etymology, author(s) of citations, it allows audio links to the pronunciation, etc. Beware: the electronic Thesaurus included in word-processing programs does not and cannot stand in for a dictionary which contains a full array of information relevant to the origins, the history, and the forms of words. Such electronic applications are primarily for spelling and for finding synonyms.

English dictionaries are a recent invention. Curiously, in Britain they started as an accidental by-product of ignorance. Anglo-Saxon monks often did not know Latin very well. Most of the texts they were copying were written in Latin, so they jogged their memories as any elementary language student might do today by writing translations ("glosses") between the lines. By the beginning of the eighth century the first lists of Latin-to-English glosses appeared, organized either by topic or alphabetically. Such lists are known as *glossaries*. The earliest known glossary arranged in alphabetical sequence not by the Latin, but by the English word, was produced in the thirteenth century. These were, however, only bilingual aids. It took another three centuries before someone realized there might be money to be made by publishing lists of English hard words with explanations of their meanings also in English. The first such publication appeared at the beginning of

the seventeenth century. The first moderately complete English dictionary was another 150 years later: *A Dictionary of the English Language* in two volumes, by Samuel Johnson, published in 1755. Modern lexicography is therefore less than 300 years old.

The making of dictionaries has been a major scholarly occupation and a flourishing business enterprise for publishers in the last two centuries. In the twenty-first century electronic versions of the printed dictionaries have become an essential teaching and research tool. Since availability and access varies, here we will introduce three sources without which the exercises in the online Workbook accompanying this textbook cannot be completed.

The ***Oxford English Dictionary*** (***OED***) (http://dictionary.oed.com/) will be your primary reference aid. The *OED* online is unsurpassed in the richness and flexibility of use of its database. The wealth of information and search options available on the website can, however, be intimidating. For the college or university student unfamiliar with the organization of the entries, the website provides a helpful guide; we recommend also the very useful article entitled "Working with the online version of the Oxford English Dictionary" by T. T. L. Davidson (http://dictionary.oed.com/learning/university/worksheet.html). The article offers easy-to-follow step-by-step advice on searches with the following sample aims (we cite):

- Look up the meanings of a word and how they have developed.
- Look up when words and meanings were first used.
- Find out the etymological source of a word.
- Find parts of words (e.g. the uses of prefixes such as *pre-, arch-*, or *peri-*, or suffixes such as *-ology, -nik*, or *-ate*) and generally to investigate word-formation in English.
- Find out how far the *OED* systematically records relationships between words such as synonyms (e.g. the relevant senses of *reel* and *spool*).
- Secure some support for the ideas that speakers have about likely collocations of words (e.g. that we can say *notable collector* and *distinguished collector*, but only *notable frequency* and not **distinguished frequency*).
- Examine the details of processes in English such as the emergence of "zero-derivation" forms such as when *paper* started being used as a verb, presumably having been around for some time as a noun.
- Dig out meanings of words which poets might have been using when the poem was written but which have since disappeared.
- Try to recreate the vocabulary "fields" of political and social discourses of the past.
- Find out what contribution particular writers have made to the development of new words and meanings.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (*AHD*) is another important source of information related to the contents of this book.

Its fourth edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000) is available at www.bartleby.com/61/. Although it does not have dates or citations, the *AHD* has many additional valuable features. The main entries are accompanied by sound-files, so the student can hear the word pronounced. Many items have links to color illustrations of the word, so one can actually *see* what a *pricket*, a *quoin*, or a *rabbet* looks like. Entries can be accompanied by notes on regional usage, current recommended usage, synonyms, and word-histories. Most importantly for the student interested in the earliest word-connections, the *AHD* provides links to Indo-European roots for words whose etymologies can be traced all the way back to reconstructed proto-forms. There is also an online article on Indo-European and the Indo-Europeans by Calvert Watkins, Indo-European sound correspondences, and a searchable appendix of Indo-European roots. Since the *OED* policy is not to provide reconstructed Indo-European forms, the *AHD* will be indispensable to the user of this book for mastering the material in Chapter 8.

Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged, is found at http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/. The (current) electronic version carries a 2002 copyright. It is a fully searchable version which contains over 450,000 vocabulary definitions, each with etymological and phonological information, and very extensive usage examples. The *Webster's Third* provides some dates of the appearance of new senses; it allows searches of authors cited, and in addition to the usual types of searches it has the potential to search for rhymes, homophones, cryptograms.

We have only mentioned three online resources here – we believe that between them anyone using the book will be sufficiently well served. They have "aged" well, if a decade is enough for that qualification. This is not to say that there are no other good resources on the web – the electronic-based records of language are constantly growing, but we have no doubt that the *OED*, the *AHD*, and *Webster's Third* will continue to provide most reliable scholarly lexicographical information.

1 Word-origins

The two general themes of this book are the origins and the structure of English words. Our word-stock is huge. It is useful to divide it up between words that belong to the common language that everybody knows from an early age and words that are learned in the course of our education. The former, the core vocabulary, is nearly the same for everyone. The latter, the learned vocabulary, is peripheral and certainly not shared by everyone. The core vocabulary is not an area where we need special instruction – the core vocabulary is acquired at a pre-educational stage. Our learned vocabulary is a different matter. It varies greatly in size and composition from one individual to another, depending on education and fields of specialization. No single individual ever controls more than a fraction of the learned vocabulary. Often the extent of one's vocabulary becomes a measure of intellect. Knowledge about the history and structure of our words – both the core and the learned vocabulary – is a valuable asset.

The vocabulary of English is not an unchanging list of words. New words enter the language every day, words acquire or lose meanings, and words cease to be used. The online *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) is updated quarterly with at least 1,000 new and revised entries; this is a fair measure of how dynamic our vocabulary is. The two sources of new words are borrowing and word-creation. In fields of higher learning, like the life sciences, physical sciences, medicine, law, the fine arts, and the social sciences, English has usually borrowed words from other languages to get new words to cover new concepts or new material or abstract phenomena. Words referring to notions and objects specific to other cultures are often borrowed wholesale. We may borrow a word as a whole, or just its central parts (the roots). We have borrowed mainly from Latin, Greek, and French. The discussion of borrowing will be a central theme in later chapters; in this chapter, we focus on the patterns of vocabulary innovation – the creation of new words – that occur within English. Before we identify the many ways of vocabulary enrichment, however, we want to address briefly the whole notion of lexical heritage.

1 Lexical heritage

Our lexical heritage consists of all those words which we as speakers receive from our predecessors when we acquire our native language. These

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