

WORDS POUR INTO ENGLISH - part two

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In part two of a three-part article, Jean Aitchison continues her exploration of how words enter the English language. Here, she looks at words entering from other languages and also new words.

Words from other languages: 'loanwords'

This trend of swallowing up foreign words has continued. They come from many different countries. But foreign words are not the main source of new words now. Most new words come from the areas of new technology (computers, Internet, biotechnology, sport, entertainment, business, and changes in society). However, you will find new uses of existing foreign words, such as this new use of the French word *beaucoup*:

beaucoup *AmE spoken informal* a lot of or many: *He makes beaucoup bucks (=earns a lot of money) in that job.*

From Hindi:

bindi a small amount of coloured powder or a piece of cloth in the shape of a round mark, which many Hindu people wear on their forehead between their eyebrows. Bindis are worn for religious reasons and by women to show they are married, but now women wear them to make themselves more attractive or fashionable.

Many new words that come from other languages are food words, such as **latte** (Italian for a type of milky coffee), **taqueria** (a type of restaurant in Mexican Spanish), and **radicchio** (Italian; a type of lettuce).

Words from American English

The importance of American English is growing all the time, due to two things in particular: the dominant position of the United States in the world's economy, and this includes its role as the leading provider of computer and internet software, and the influence of American popular culture through films, TV, and popular music. Words that are not new in the US, but which have become widely accepted and used throughout the world, are included as new words in the New Words supplement to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. For example, **majorly** (*slang* extremely) is not a new word in the US, but has gained wider use throughout the world, and so is included in New Words, without being labelled as American English.

Of course, words that are new in American English are also included, as the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* includes wide coverage of American and other varieties of

English, as well as British English. For example, the new phrase **somebody got game** is an idiom in American English spoken language, used to say that someone is very skilful at doing something, especially playing a sport. Another new entry is **whassup**, an American slang word meaning 'hello', from 'What's up?' used especially as a greeting to someone you know well.

The adoption of words from American English, coming particularly from the worlds of business, youth and black culture, pop music, computers, and the Internet, is a significant trend in British English, which is reflected in the New Words supplement.

But loanwords (words that are adopted from other languages) are only one source of new words. Another, major, source is word formation, as will be discussed next.

New words

'The vocabulary of a language can in no way be regarded as an inert completed mass ... the vocabulary is a constant generation and regeneration of the word-making capacity', the German philosopher-linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt pointed out in 1836. This 'word-making capacity' can be explored in two ways. First, areas of life which have given rise to new words can be investigated. Second, the linguistic devices used to create such words can be examined.

New words provide insights into the preoccupations of their time. In the early 20th century, for example, many words relating to transport were created: parts of cars, such as *accelerator*; words relating to air travel, such as *airline*, *airport*, *air terminal*. To these were added modern domestic appliances such as *central heating*, *vacuum cleaner*, and, of course, *radio* and *television*.

Now, in the early 21st century, new words relating to computers and the Internet possibly outnumber all others, for example:

cybersickness a feeling of illness caused by using a computer for long periods of time or being in a room with a lot of computers

keypals someone with whom you regularly exchange e-mail: *If your daughter is interested in having a keypal next year, please have her get in touch.*

screenager *informal* a young person who spends a lot of time using computers and the Internet

Finance has also launched numerous new words, such as:

dead cat bounce *technical informal* a situation in which the price of shares rises a small amount after a large fall, sometimes before falling further

stealth tax *BrE informal* a tax that you pay on something that you buy rather than tax you pay directly to the government, and which you are less aware of paying than, for example, direct tax on your income

Sometimes finance and computers come together, as with:

dot-com *informal* relating to a person or company whose business is done using the Internet or involves the Internet: *a dot-com company* | *dot-com millionaires*

e-cash money that can be used to buy things on the Internet, but that does not exist in a physical form or belong to any particular country

New words are needed for new things, and many have come from science, technology, and business. To take just a few examples - from computers and the Internet - **online auction**, **PDA** or **personal digital assistant**, **access provider**, **animatronics**, **cookie**, **MP3**; from medicine and biological science - **biologically engineered**, **DNA profiling**, **genetically modified**; from the world of business - **benchmark**, **best practice**, **SOHO** (small office/home office), and so on.