

The Greek Influence on the English Language The Greek Thesaurus in English

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Περίληψη

Η εργασία αυτή αποτελεί απόρροια του μεγάλου ενδιαφέροντός μου σχετικά με το ζήτημα της επίδρασης της ελληνικής γλώσσας στην αγγλική. Πολλοί Βρετανοί λεξικογράφοι επισημαίνουν αρκετά συχνά ότι η πλήρης κατανόηση της αγγλικής γλώσσας απαιτεί βαθιά γνώση (και) της ελληνικής ρίζας της. Η Ελλάδα, ως κύρια πηγή του πολιτισμού μας, παραμένει ζωντανή μέσα από τη χρήση όλων των λέξεων ελληνικής καταγωγής.

Για να μπορέσουμε να αποκτήσουμε βαθύτερη γνώση της σημασίας των ανωτέρω, θα αναφέρω εν συντομία μερικά ενδιαφέροντα στατιστικά στοιχεία που είναι πράγματι εκπληκτικά: σύμφωνα με το διεθνές λεξικό Webster η αγγλική γλώσσα αριθμεί περίπου 166.724 λέξεις, εκ των οποίων οι 41.214 είναι ελληνικής προέλευσης. Από την άλλη, ο Α. Κωνσταντινίδης, στο αξιόλογο έργο του «Οι ελληνικές λέξεις στην αγγλική γλώσσα», υποστηρίζει ότι το σύνολο της ιατρικής ορολογίας στα αγγλικά ανέρχεται σε 43.716 λέξεις, εκ των οποίων οι 20.346 είναι ελληνικές.

Σίγουρα δεν πρόκειται για απλή σύμπτωση το γεγονός ότι όλες οι βασικές έννοιες της σκέψης και της έκφρασης στην αγγλική γλώσσα είναι καθαρά ελληνικής καταγωγής: "ανάλυση" (1667), "σύνθεση" (1611), "αντίθετο" (1529), "μέθοδος" (1541), "θεραπεία" (1605), "δόγμα" (1600), «διάγνωση» (1681) κλπ (οι αριθμοί στις παρενθέσεις δείχνουν την ημερομηνία που κάθε μία από τις παραπάνω λέξεις εμφανίζονται σε κείμενο στην αγγλική γλώσσα για πρώτη φορά). Είναι πραγματικά αξιοσημείωτο το γεγονός ότι λέξεις της εποχής του Ομήρου και του Αριστοτέλη εισάγονται στην αγγλική γλώσσα δεκαπέντε ή δεκαεπτά αιώνες αργότερα. Συνειδητοποιούμε συνεπώς τη μεγάλη έκταση της ελληνικής συνεισφοράς στον ανθρωπισμό και στον πολιτισμό γενικότερα.

Αλλά γιατί τόσες πολλές δυτικοευρωπαϊκές γλώσσες καταφεύγουν στο ελληνικό γλωσσάριο για να εκφράσουν συναισθήματα, έννοιες, ιδέες ή για να κατονομάσουν αντικείμενα; Η διαίσθησή μου είναι ότι η ελληνική γλώσσα, περισσότερο από τη Λατινική, είναι προσφορότερη και ιδανικότερη στη δημιουργία νέων λέξεων. Τα Λατινικά, αν και πολύ ευέλικτα ως γλώσσα, παρουσιάζουν δυσκολίες στην παραγωγή σύνθετων λέξεων, δηλαδή στο να εισαγάγουν δύο διαφορετικές έννοιες σε μία μόνο λέξη. Η επιστήμη ανακαλύπτει συνεχώς νέα αντικείμενα και έννοιες! Ένα όνομα πρέπει να δοθεί σε αυτές. Ο ελληνικός γλωσσικός θησαυρός είναι η λύση.

Για να αποδείξω με τρόπο αποτελεσματικό και πρακτικό ότι η ελληνική γλώσσα αποτελεί μία από τις πλουσιότερες πηγές της σύγχρονης αγγλικής γλώσσας ως προς το λεξιλογικό πλούτο, αποφάσισα να προβώ στην επιλογή ενός αντιπροσωπευτικού αποσπάσματος και να προσπαθήσω να υπογραμμίσω το βαθμό της ελληνικής συμβολής στο σημασιολογικό, σημειωτικό και αισθητικό αποτέλεσμα του κειμένου αυτού.

Λέξεις – Κλειδιά: Ελληνικός γλωσσικός θησαυρός, Γλωσσική επίδραση, Ελληνικά γλωσσικά δάνεια στην Αγγλική γλώσσα, Παραγωγή νέων και σύνθετων λέξεων.

Abstract

This work grew out of a great concern regarding the question of the influence of the Greek language on English. Many British lexicographers quite often point out that the full understanding of the English language requires a deep knowledge of its Greek roots. Greece as a main source of our civilization remains alive through the use of all the words of Greek origin.

In order for us to gain a greater insight into the importance of the above, I shall mention briefly some interesting statistical figures which are indeed astonishing: according to the Webster International Dictionary the total of the word stock of the English language is 166,724 words, out of which 41,214 are Greek. On the other hand, A. Konstandinides, in his remarkable work "The Greek Words in the English language", argues that the whole of the medical terminology in

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English amounts to 43,716 words, out of which 20,346 are Greek. It is not a mere coincidence that all the basic concepts of thought and expression in English are words of sheer Greek origin: “analysis” (1667), “synthesis” (1611), “antithesis” (1529), “method” (1541), “therapy” (1605), “dogma” (1600), “diagnosis” (1681) etc (the numbers in brackets indicate the date that each of the above words appears in any English text for the first time). It is really a worth mentioning fact that words of the era of Homer and Aristotle are introduced into the English language fifteen or seventeen centuries later; we realize, therefore, the great extent of the Greek contribution to the evaluation of humanity and culture in general. But why so many Western European languages resort to the Greek glossary to express feelings, concepts, ideas or to name objects; My intuition is that the Greek language, more than Latin, is suitable and ideal for the creation of new words. Latin, though very flexible, has difficulties in the production of compound words to introduce two different meanings in one single word. Science constantly discovers new objects and concepts; a name must be given to them. The Greek thesaurus is the solution.

To prove in a more effective and practical way that the Greek language constitutes one of the richest foreign sources of the present English word stock, I decided to proceed to the selection of one representative passage and try to highlight the degree of the Greek contribution to the semantic, semiotic and aesthetic outcome of the passage.

Key Words: The Greek linguistic Thesaurus, Linguistic influence, Greek linguistic loans to the English language, Production of new and compound words.

Text selection

The criteria for text selection are manifold, controversial and ultimately subjective. Every individual would place the important points in a different order of significance. My aim was to find a representative text, which would be as unbiased and accessible as possible. Moreover, I tried to select a highly interesting, striking and creative passage, mainly in terms of context, style, syntax and certainly lexis. To achieve such a goal I had sometimes to omit some paragraphs, to select others and finally combine them. The result, I hope, justifies such interference.

With all these thoughts and clarifications in mind, I proceeded to the analysis of a passage taken from the world of Developmental Clinical Psychology and Psychiatry. One could very well claim that it is an autotelic text (although it is not) and it deals with the complicated and widespread problem of autism, that is, the failure to develop social abilities, language and other communication skills to the usual level, together with a severe limitation on the number of a person’s activities and interests.

The Passage

“Kanner’s use of the term autism has proven to be somewhat unfortunate, because of its association with the term used by Bleuler to describe the withdrawal into an active fantasy adopted by schizophrenics. Actually the concept of autism describes the very absence of any creative fantasy life which characterizes the withdrawal of such children. Hence, clinicians and diagnosticians have worked to differentiate autism from other identified disorders: Berta Rank (1955) used the term “atypical ego” development emphasizing the psychoanalytic perspective. Mahler (1952), described the children as suffering from “symbiotic psychosis” and thus a pathological mother-child relationship.

Intimately related to prevailing perspective on the aetiology of autism are the various treatment approaches developed over the years. The 1940s and 1950s can be characterized as giving rise to several treatment philosophies, each based on the theoretical perspective advocated by the practitioner. Thus, diagnosis, etiological hypotheses and specific treatments varied. The treatments varied from psychoanalysis of the parents’ institutionalization of the patient, psychotropic drugs, megavitamin regimens, electroshock and treatments based on learning theory principles” (Ritvo, 1976).

The Greek influence in the above passage is obvious: out of the 170 total words of it, 33 are of Greek origin, that is, we get a percentage of 19.4 overall.

Etymological Analysis

It will greatly help our efforts for a deeper understanding of the Greek origin words of the passage, if we employ etymology for such a purpose. Besides, etymology transforms the word, in whole or in part, so to bring it nearer to the word(s) with which it is thought to be connected.

So, an etymological analysis reveals the following interesting results:

autism > αὐτός = self: term used by Kanner < autistic

fantasy > φαίνω = show < fantastic, fantastical.

Schizophrenic > σχίζω + φρην = split + brain : first used by Kepler because he regarded schizophrenia as a mental disease with basic symptoms being inconsistency of logical thinking (irrationality) > schizophrenic.

Characterize > χαρακτηρ < character, characteristic

Clinician > κλίνη = bed < clinical, clinoid.

Diagnostician > diagnosis = δια + γινώσκω = foresee < diagnose.

Atypical = α + τύπος = the one who does not have any certain characteristics < atypism, atypically.

Ego > εγώ = I, myself.

Emphasizing > ἐμφασις > εν + φήμη = support strongly < emphasis.

Psychoanalytic > ψυχή + αναλύω = soul + analyze (used by Freud) <-ysis

Pathological > πάσχω + λόγος = suffer + science < pathology.

Mother > μήτηρ > Indo-European origin.

Psychosis > ψυχή = soul < psychotic.

Aetiology > αίτιον + λόγος = cause + speech (term widely used in philosophy) < etiologic-al, etiologist.

Philosophy > φιλώ + σοφία = love + wisdom < philosophical, philosopher.

Based > Βάση = base.

Theoretical > θεωρώ > see very well < theory, theoretic-al.

Practitioner > πράττω = do < practice, practical.

Hypotheses > υπό + θέτω = put something under (consideration) < hypothetical.

Psychotropic > ψυχή + τρόπος = soul + manner

Megavitamin > μέγα + βιταμίνη = mega (affix) + vitamin.

Electroshock > ήλεκτρον + shock = amber + shock (the first electric phenomenon was noticed by Thales of Miletus with the help of some pieces of amber).

Before we proceed to the next stage some brief explanatory comments appear to be more than necessary. An etymological analysis as the above allows us to realize that the revival of Greek learning in Western Europe, which began to be felt in England soon after the commencement of the 16th century, opened a new source from which the English vocabulary could be enriched. Long before this time the language contained a certain number of Greek words, which had come in through the medium of Latin. And nearly all these Latinized Greek words had been adopted into all the languages of Europe and were extensively used in the language of science.

So, for example, words such as “fantasy”, “ego”, aetiology”, “philosophy”, “based”, “theoretical”, “hypotheses”, “megavitamin” - all taken from our passage - had entered the English glossary, when Latin was still the ordinary vehicle of literature, science and philosophy and when new technical terms of Greek etymology were generally used in modern Latin before they found their way into the vernacular tongue. It therefore became a general European convention that when a new word was adopted from Greek into English, it should be treated as if it had passed through a Latin channel. More specifically, the Greek suffix “-ia” (fantasia, aetiologia, philosophia) was transliterated by the Latin suffix “-y” (phantasy, aetiology, philosophy). Greek adjectives were usually anglicized by the addition of the suffix “-ous”, “-an”, or “-al”. Thus, the suffix “-ikos”: theoritikos, pathologikos, psychotikos and the suffix “-os”: “atypos” are represented by the English “pathological”, “physical”, “clinical” etc. Moreover, the Greek “-k-, -ai-, -ei-, -oi-, -ou-, -u-, were transliterated by the Latin “-c-, -ae-, -i-, -oe-, -u-, -y-, respectively and the initial “r” by “rh” - for example ρητορική > rhetoric. Such clarifications can be useful for any understanding of an etymological analysis, since they reveal the various modifications that a word has undergone, after it was adopted by the English language.

Phonological Analysis and Pronunciation

When a foreign word is borrowed, it may not retain its original pronunciation in the adopting language. If one of its sounds already exists in English, it will probably be adopted in an accurate form; if, however, some of the sounds of the particular word are alien to the adopting language (English), each of them will be replaced by the nearest native sound. This fact explains why there are different pronunciations in some English words of Greek origin, for instance, the Greek nasal vowels are substituted by the English non-nasal vowels.

Sometimes a foreign word is partly anglicized. So, the Greek word “ego” (first paragraph of our text) is usually pronounced in Greek with the first vowel like the English “egg” - / eg / , but in English it has changed and is pronounced in the same way as the word, say “economic”, that is, / i: gau // i: kanomik /.

Apart from the anglicizing tendency, the more recently a word has been adopted by English, the more likely it is to retain its original pronunciation, because it is affected by fewer purely English changes -changes which have been going on continuously ever since English became an independent language in the fourth or fifth century.

The juxtaposition of English and Modern Greek phonemes in terms of their points and modes of articulation helps to illustrate the potential points of linguistic borrowing from Greek to English. To such an aim greatly contributes David Seaman’s work “Modern Greek and British English in Contact” where the consonantal and vowel phonemes of English and Greek are presented in detail, helping the readers to compare and contrast the two languages. Comparing the phonemic inventories of the two languages one may realize that there are quantitative as well as qualitative differences in the two systems: there are twice as many vowels in English compared to the Greek ones, whereas for the consonants the opposite is true. It is also worth mentioning that all language changes take place anywhere, not necessarily under the influence of other languages. At any time, in any language in contact with another there may be both inter -and- intralinguistic force.

In general, when attempting to predict linguistic borrowing between English and Greek, linguists now generally agree that “the greater the number of similarities present between the foreign sound and the native phoneme in both articulation and distribution, the more difficult the mastery of a particular foreign sound or sequence of sounds will be” (Koutsoudas 1962 p.207). My experience as a native speaker of Greek would strongly corroborate that statement.

Referential Analysis

George Eliot wrote in chapter three of “Middlemarch” that “signs are small memorable things, but interpretations are illimitable”. A text can be full of such signs with consequent meanings, which lead, to inevitably widespread interpretations. The receiver of the message of the text reacts and responds to the text in terms, which can range from the purely practical to the aesthetic. Some texts stimulate more language production than others, some give information, some give more imaginative stimuli.

According to John McRae’s work “Literature with a small “I”, representational language is the language, which engages the imagination of the receiver, whereas referential language is the language, which communicates on only one level, usually in terms of information being sought or given. It states, it shows, it denotes exactly like the language of the scientist and the philosopher (The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory).

In areas such as journalism, philosophy etc, facts and opinions are presented as objectively as possible, without a great deal of imaginative involvement. A careful and rigorous examination of our text leads us to the conclusion that the language used is highly referential, since it does not engage any of the reader’s imaginative faculties but, on the contrary, it is full of information and psychological concepts and meanings.

But the language of our text is used for many more purposes than simply conveying information; it is a means of communication with the reader -a way of interaction between him and the author. Certainly vocabulary contributes greatly to such a purpose. A text, in order to be great, requires excellence not only in the context of the message, in our case, “Autism and its nature”, but also in its linguistic organization and expression. The Greek language is rich and diverse, it is

concise and accurate and at the same time laconic and elegant in style. Psychologists and other specialists need a constantly increasing special vocabulary, whether they add new terms or give new meanings to old ones.

This reality justifies, therefore, the high percentage of Greek words in our text. Words such as “autism”, “schizophrenics”, “fantasy”, “characterize”, “pathological”, “aetiology”, etc. provide the author with the unique ability to overcome any kind of communicative hurdle and to discuss with great efficiency difficult and complex technical matters and terms.

Quite often in a highly referential language like this the reader needs to devote much concentration to the mechanical aspects of vocabulary -words like “symbiotic psychosis”, “psychotropic”, “megavitamin” and “atypical ego” are sometimes difficult to be understood by people who have no experience in the field. In order to understand their sheer referential nature we have to bear in mind that they constitute individual vocabulary items, which make statements about actual things in actual situations. They are not merely an effect of some complicated psychological ideas and processes, but they are part of these psychological processes. They constitute scientific meanings and thus scientific practices (Fowler et al, 1979 p. 2). On the other hand, nobody can deny that words like “clinicians”, “diagnosticians”, “practitioner”, “electroshock”, etc. refer to some unique examples known to an immediately identifiable by the author and his addresser in some particular situation.

Actually, they all exist as generic concepts which are either concrete like “clinician” or “practitioner” or abstract like “philosophies”, “psychoanalysis”, “autism”, etc. Such references are regarded to be specific real facts in a specific real situation. This is the meaning expressed by the author’s use of the definite article and it indicates that he is communicatively “pointing to something which he himself claims he knows to exist as a fact and so the reader can recognize it as a fact too” (Roger, 1991).

So, for example, the definite article in “the psychoanalytic”, “the aetiology”, “the theoretical” etc. plays exactly the role of specification and precision. The abstract referential concepts, on the other hand, by no means imply non-existence, but only deficit or absence, and their noun form asserts their real existence, for example “schizophrenics”, “psychosis”, “theory”, “aetiology”, etc.

Conclusion

Nearly all the words that English owes to the Greek language, directly or indirectly, are mainly and originally scientific or technical, though many of those of older date (adopted through medieval Latin and French) have long taken their place in the popular vocabulary. Now and then a Greek word of non-technical character is employed in anglicized form in order to express accurately and precisely a certain concept or idea. And this is exactly the great importance and value of the Greek language. A term taken from Greek, or formed out of Greek elements, can be rigidly confined to the meaning expressed in its definition; a term of native formation cannot be so easily divested of popular associations. If, for example, the English founders of the science of geology had chosen to call it “earth love”, everyone would have felt that the word ought to have a far wider meaning than that which was assigned to it (Bradley, 1914). The Greek compound, which means just the same thing, has been without difficulty restricted to only one of the many possible applications of its literal sense. Exactly the same applies to psychology and the other branches of science.

The great extent of the intercourse of the two languages is very vividly depicted in the speech of Xenophon Zolotas, which was given on 26 September 1957 in Washington, during the session of the “International Numismatic Fund” Organization. This speech includes only Greek words and is a unique proof of the deep influence of Greek on the English language.

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