

## EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGE

### 1. Uwagi ogólne

Tekst *Evolution of language* jest adresowany głównie do studentów kierunków humanistycznych, a także studentów innych kierunków, jak filozofii i kulturoznawstwa, zainteresowanych tematyką uniwersalnych zjawisk i zmian zachodzących we współczesnym języku w zakresie semantyki i użycia konkretnych pojęć w języku.

### 2. Poziom zaawansowania: B2+/C1

### 3. Czas trwania opisanych ćwiczeń: około 30 minut

### 4. Cele dydaktyczne

Materiał ten służy przybliżeniu studentom ciekawej teorii dotyczącej rozwoju języka oraz sposobu, w jaki znaczenie dwóch pojęć ewoluuje i upodabnia się do siebie. Ponadto może stanowić przyczynek do dyskusji na temat zmian zachodzących we współczesnym języku lub być uzupełnieniem innej lekcji o pokrewnej tematyce.

### 5. Uwagi i sugestie

Ćwiczenia można przeprowadzać jako całość lub podzielić na dwa niezależne moduły i wykorzystać jako uzupełnienie tematu o rozwoju języka czy ewolucji znaczenia pojęć. Najlepiej jest dać studentom czas na zastanowienie się w parach, zanim odpowiedzi zostaną omówione na forum grupy. Ewentualna dalsza dyskusja zależy od wiedzy, którą studenci posiadają w tym zakresie.

## EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGE

1. In pairs, discuss if you have ever heard any theories concerning the evolution of language. If so, what were their main assumptions?
2. Read Part I the following passage and answer the questions.
  1. Who is the author of this theory on the evolution of language?
  2. What is the evolution of language compared to?
  3. What usually happens to the majority of mutations in language?
  4. Which changes enter the language?
  5. What stages of language evolution are distinguished? Describe them in your own words.
  6. Do you think Garner's illustration of his theory is controversial?

### On the Origin of the Language

*by Rob Kyff*

#### PART I

You might call language expert Bryan Garner “the Darwin of the Dictionary.” He believes that language evolves just as species do.

“Over time, words and phrases mutate both in form and in meaning, sometimes through useful innovation and sometimes through unconscious drift and pervasive error,” he writes in his authoritative and highly respected “Garner’s Modern American Usage.” “Usually the mutations don’t survive, but occasionally a change proves meritorious and ends up becoming a part of the standard language. That happens only if it’s fit enough to survive.”

Rather than simply condemning or approving usages, Garner ranks their acceptability on a five-stage “Language-Change Index”: stage 1 — rejected; stage 2 — widely shunned; stage 3 — commonplace but to be avoided in careful usage; stage 4 — ubiquitous, but opposed by a few linguistic stalwarts; stage 5 — fully accepted.

He compares the reputation of each stage to an etiquette offense at the dining table: 1 — audible breaking wind; 2 — audible belching; 3 — overloud talking; 4 — elbows on table; 5 — refined.

Garner’s examples for each stage provide a fascinating glimpse into the evolution of current usage.

3. Read Part II of the text. The stage order has been mixed up. Decide what the logical order of the stages should be. The first stage has been marked.

## PART II

Not surprisingly, **stage (a)** ...1... usages include dialectical terms such as “brung” and “threwed,” as well as some common misspellings: “baited breath” for “bated breath” and “bellweather” for “bellwether.”

**Stage (b)** ..... includes common errors made even by well-educated writers and speakers: “hone in on” for “home in on,” “til” for “till,” “flaunt” for “flout.”

**Stage (c)** ..... presents usages that, though once suspect, are now considered acceptable: “contact” as a verb, “badly” to mean “very much” (“need badly”) and “res-tive” to mean “nervous” instead of “intractable, stubborn.”

**Stage (d)** ..... is a no-man’s land of gray-area usages: “unbeknownst” for “unbeknown,” “nauseous” for “nauseated,” and “comprise” for “compose,” as in “nine justices comprise the Supreme Court.”

**Stage (e)** ..... features mistakes involving plurals (“criteria” for “criterion”) and pronouns (“between you and I”) as well as some common misuses of verbs (“infer” for “imply” and “peruse” to mean “scan hastily” rather than “read carefully”).

## Conclusion

Of this last batch, some of us might ask, “Who knew there was ever anything wrong with them in the first place?” And that’s precisely Garner’s point. These “mutations” have survived, evolved and prevailed.

Source: [http://articles.courant.com/2011-03-14/features/hc-word-watch-0314-20110314\\_1\\_mutations-common-errors-common-misuses](http://articles.courant.com/2011-03-14/features/hc-word-watch-0314-20110314_1_mutations-common-errors-common-misuses), access: 7 March, 2016

## 4. Discuss

1. Does Rob Kyff’s conclusion agree or disagree with Garner’s theory of how mutations get accepted in language?
2. Does this theory seem convincing to you? Why (not)?

## EVOLUTION OF MEANING

5. Read an article on the meaning of two verbs. How does the writer describe this stage of change in the meaning of a word?

### Forget P's and Q's

*by Rob Kyff*

“Because you already know the story of Cinderella,” wrote Amy Krouse Rosenthal in a review of a new children’s book, “I’m going to **home** in on the particulars here.”

That prompted a reader to write me, “I think it should be ‘**hone**,’ as in sharpen.”

Ah-ha! We’ve caught a usage in transition, one of those rare, ephemeral moments when the verbal wind shifts.

By all traditional standards, Ms. Rosenthal was correct to use “**home in on**.” This phrase first emerged during the 1800s as a reference to homing pigeons that return to their roost by “**homing in**” on it.

During the 1920s, the phrase got a big boost from the new technologies of radio and aviation, as pilots “**homed in**” on a signal from an airport or base. During the 1950s, the phrase was re-popularized by missiles designed to “**home in**” on their targets. Soon “**home in on**” had become a general phrase for identifying a target, narrowing the focus or centering attention on something. Today, we **home in** on everything: social problems, terrorists, diseases and, in our real-estate obsessed society, home itself.

But, before we head for “home,” it’s important to acknowledge my reader’s concern. She may just be what sociologists call an “early adopter,” someone who’s the first to use a new technology or, in this case, a new usage. For, indeed, a case can be made for “**hone in on**.” “**Hone**,” after all, originally meant to sharpen a metal blade on a whetstone, to gradually grind the metal to produce the keenest edge possible. Eventually, “**hone**” took on the metaphoric meaning of perfecting something or making it more intense, e.g. honing your skills.

Given the close association between “**honing**” or sharpening something and “**homing**” or zeroing in on something, it’s easy to see how the two senses have come to overlap.

The American Heritage Dictionary, for instance, includes this definition and sample sentence for the phrase “**hone in on**” — “to move or advance toward a target or goal. The missiles **honed in on** the military installation.” Sounds a lot like “**home in on**” to me.

So while some usage experts huff and puff about the “misuse” of “**hone in on**” for “**home in on**,” we average folks have proclaimed the nakedness of the emperor. In some contexts, the two phrases are so similar in meaning that they’re virtually interchangeable.

Source: [http://articles.courant.com/2006-10-06/features/0610060335\\_1\\_hone-phrase-home](http://articles.courant.com/2006-10-06/features/0610060335_1_hone-phrase-home), access: 14 February, 2013.

## 6. Answer the following questions.

1. We can use 'home in on' for military meanings. T / F
2. You can use 'home in on' for in a variety of contexts, including social issues and housing. T / F
3. The original meaning of 'home in' was 'to sharpen.' T / F
4. 'Hone' has never acquired a metaphorical meaning. T / F
5. The meanings of 'home in' and 'hone in' were always similar. T / F
6. Despite the similarity, the meaning of 'home in' and 'hone in' are not quite the same. T / F
7. Despite the similarity, the meaning of 'home in' and 'hone in' are not quite the same. T / F

## 7. Find evidence in the text and answer the questions.

1. Who, according to the writer, are 'early adopters' in language?
2. What does it mean to 'huff and puff'?
3. What does the writer mean by "we average folks have proclaimed the nakedness of the emperor?"

## 8. Discuss. Do you know any other words in English or in your own language, which came to overlap or became interchangeable with time?

## KEY

1. SS' own suggestions
2. 1 – Bryan Garner, 2 – the evolution of species by Charles Darwin, 3 – They disappear, 4 – those that are fit enough to survive, 5 – “Language Change Index”: rejected, widely avoided, common but avoided in careful usage, very common but not fully accepted, fully accepted, 6 – the comparison to bad manners at table might be controversial, but SS may express their own opinions here.
3. 1a, 2e, 3b, 4d, 5c
4. 1 – Rob Kyff agrees with Garner's theory, 2 – SS' own answers
5. a rare, ephemeral moment when the verbal wing shifts (meaning changes)
6. 1T, 2T, 3T, 4F, 5T, 6F
7. 1 – people who first begin to use a word in a new sense, 2 – look down on something, express disapproval, 3 – ordinary users of language do not see any difference in meaning between ‘home in’ and ‘hone in’
8. SS' own examples