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CONTENTS

SL. No.	Title of the Articles	Author Names	Page Nos.
1	A Study on Financial Inclusion through Social Security Schemes in India: Performance and Progress	Rangaswamy.D & Dr.N.Nagaraja	1
2	Health Status among Ager Community people in Ankola taluka of North Kanara district of Karnataka	Dr. Ashok Kumar.A & Dr. Nanjundaiah	9
3	Effect of Extensive and Intensive Interval Training on Speed and Cardio Respiratory Endurance among Football Players	Dr. Basavaraj I. Ambiger & Dr. P. Kulothungan	15
4	Time is the best motivation for the running athletes to break their own records - a Study	Dr.Chandrashekar. K	21
5	Geoffrey Chaucer's Contribution to English Language and Literature	Chethan.M	28
6	An Analysis of Operational Performance and Growth of Milk Federation in Karnataka	Ramesha. V & Dr.N.Nagaraja	35
7	The Challenges of Teaching Fitness in an Era of Physical Inactivity in Schools- A Brief Study	Dr.B.V.Ganesh	43
8	Professional development and in-service training on classroom physical Fitness activity - A Study	Dr.Gayathramma.G.P	50
9	A Study on -Effects of Aerobic Capacity, Muscular Endurance and Body Mass Index for Promoting physically active lifestyles among youths	Dr.Rekha.M.R	56
10	Leisure time physical activity as a determinant of self-perceived health and fitness in Quality of Life Among the Adults- An Overview	Dr.Revanna.C	63
11	Ethical Dilemmas in Sports Reporting: A Comprehensive Multidisciplinary Study	Dr.Bhaskar. K.S	70
12	Fostering Sports Management: A Comprehensive Study in Engineering Institutions	Kavya R & Dr. Kiran G.N	76
13	Role of Green Banking in Promoting Sustainable Development with Special Reference to Indian Banking Sector	Gurudatt Kamath B	81
14	Social networking tools for library services -An overview	H.C.Gangadhara	86

15	Information Literacy: An Overview	Dr. Jayakumara & Manjunath M K	90
16	The role of collaborating educational technology and methods of teaching in Physical education- A Study	Jayashree.K	95
17	Libraries effectively use social networking sites to engage with their user communities and promote library services-An Overview	Kathyayini.N	101
18	Use of social media to promote library services	Kavitha.B.L	106
19	Comparative Study of Selected Physical Fitness ability among Girl and Boy Badminton Players in Mysore City	Kiran Kumar.R & Dr. Channappa.C	111
20	Emerging Issues and Challenges Faced by Startup Companies in India- An Overview	Mahendra Kumar .B.R	117
21	A study on Pros and cons effects of caffeine on athletic performance	Mallesha.K.L	124
22	Exploring yoga's holistic model for health and well-being in 21 st Century	Manju.S	130
23	An Analysis and Comparison of Selected Kinematic Variables between Jump Shots and Layup Shots in Basketball	Joshua, Madhu G R & Dr.Jayaprakash	138
24	A study on Pros and cons of physical education in schools and Colleges	Naganna.M.S	143
25	Emerging Trends in Recruitment, Selection Criteria and Organization Performance- Critical Review	Narasimhamurthy.P	147
26	English Renaissance : Major Contribution made by Shakespeare to the English Language and English Culture	Ningaraju	155
27	Studies on the in-vitro antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial and phytochemical screening of Samanea saman extracts	Wilfred A	162
28	Nature's Fever Dream: How Global Warming Reshapes Ecosystems	Dr.Ashwini.N & Prasad.N.V	168
29	Influence of transcendental Anxiety and depression on a measure of self-actualization through Yoga- An Overview	Prakash Kumar.C	173
30	Perspectives of students with intellectual disabilities about their experiences with para Educator support. - A Study	Puttaraju.S.J	178

26

ENGLISH RENAISSANCE : MAJOR CONTRIBUTION MADE BY SHAKESPEARE TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH CULTURE

NINGARAJU

Assistant Professor, Dept of English

Sri Adichunchanagiri First Grade College, Channarayapattna, Hassan (D)

Abstract

There is no doubt that William Shakespeare had a great influence not only in theater and films and other poets and novelists, but also in the English language, with words that we use every day. Many may not even know that it was him who invented or coined these words. Literally there are thousands of words that Shakespeare invented that we still use today. Who do you think invented the words manager, fashionable, eyeball, laughable, gloomy or lonely, among others?. William Shakespeare has knowledge of seven languages and usually made direct quotes in other languages directly in the plays that he wrote. It is incredible that he had a vocabulary of 24,000 words, the most for any writer, then and now.

Keywords: *Vocabulary, English Language, Renaissance, Battle of Bosworth Field, Elizabethan era, Modern English.*

Introduction

The English Renaissance was a cultural and artistic movement in England dating from the late 15th century to the early 17th century. It is associated with the pan-European Renaissance that is usually regarded as beginning in Italy in the late 14th century. As in most of the rest of northern Europe, England saw little of these developments until more than a century later. The beginning of the English Renaissance is often taken, as a convenience, to be 1485, when the Battle of Bosworth Field ended the Wars of the Roses and inaugurated the Tudor Dynasty. Renaissance style and ideas, however, were slow to penetrate England, and the Elizabethan era in the second half of the 16th century is usually regarded as the height of the English Renaissance.

The English Renaissance is different from the Italian Renaissance in several ways. The dominant art forms of the English Renaissance were literature and music. Visual arts in the English Renaissance were much less significant than in the Italian Renaissance. The English period began far later than the Italian, which was moving into Mannerism and the Baroque by the 1550s or earlier. In contrast, the English Renaissance can only truly be said to begin, shakily, in the 1520s, and it continued until perhaps 1620.

Changes in English at the time

Early Modern English as a literary medium was unfixed in structure and vocabulary in comparison to Greek, Hebrew and Latin, and was in a constant state of flux. When William Shakespeare began writing his plays, the English language was rapidly absorbing words from other languages due to wars, exploration, diplomacy and colonization. By the age of Elizabeth, English had become widely used with the expansion of philosophy, theology and physical sciences, but many writers lacked the vocabulary to express such ideas. To accommodate this, writers such as Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare expressed new ideas and

distinctions by inventing, borrowing or adopting a word or a phrase from another language, known as neologizing. Scholars estimate that, between the years 1500 and 2018, nouns, verbs and modifiers of Latin, Greek and modern Romance languages added 30,000 new words to the English language.

Influence on theatre

Shakespeare's works have been a major influence on subsequent theatre. Shakespeare created some of the most admired plays in Western literature (with *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear* being ranked among the world's greatest plays), and transformed English theatre by expanding expectations about what could be accomplished through plot and language. Specifically, in plays like *Hamlet*, Shakespeare "integrated characterization with plot," such that if the main character was different in any way, the plot would be totally changed. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare mixed tragedy and comedy together to create a new romantic tragedy genre (previous to Shakespeare, romance had not been considered a worthy topic for tragedy). Through his soliloquies, Shakespeare showed how plays could explore a character's inner motivations and conflict (up until Shakespeare, soliloquies were often used by playwrights to "introduce [characters], convey information, provide an exposition or reveal plans").

Characters

His plays exhibited "spectacular violence, with loose and episodic plotting, and with mingling of comedy with tragedy". In *King Lear*, Shakespeare had deliberately brought together two plots of different origins. Shakespeare's work is also lauded for its insight into emotion. His themes regarding the human condition make him more acclaimed than any of his contemporaries. Humanism and contact with popular thinking gave vitality to his language. Shakespeare's plays borrowed ideas from popular sources, folk traditions, street pamphlets, and sermons. Shakespeare also used groundlings widely in his plays. The use of groundlings "saved the drama from academic stiffness and preserved its essential bias towards entertainment in comedy". *Hamlet* is an outstanding example of "groundlings" quickness and response. Use of groundlings enhanced Shakespeare's work practically and artistically. He represented English people more concretely and not as puppets. His skills have found expression in chronicles, or history plays, and tragedies.

Shakespeare's earliest years were dominated by history plays and a few comedies that formed a link to the later written tragedies. Nine out of eighteen plays he produced in the first decade of his career were chronicles or histories. His histories were based on the prevailing Tudor political thought. They portrayed the follies and achievements of kings, their misgovernment, church and problems arising out of these. "In shaping, compressing, and altering chronicles, Shakespeare gained the art of dramatic design; and in the same way he developed his remarkable insight into character, its continuity and its variation". His characters were very near to reality.

"Shakespeare's characters are more sharply individualized after *Love's Labour's Lost*". His *Richard II* and *Bolingbroke* are complex and solid figures whereas *Richard III* has more "humanity and comic gusto". The *Falstaff* trilogy is in this respect very important. *Falstaff*, although a minor character, has a powerful reality of its own. "Shakespeare uses him as a commentator who passes judgments on events represented in the play, in the light of his own super abundant comic vitality". *Falstaff*, although outside "the prevailing political spirit of the play", throws insight into the different situations arising in the play. This shows that Shakespeare had developed a capacity to see the plays as whole, something more than characters and expressions added together. In *Falstaff* trilogy, through the character of *Falstaff*, he wants to show that in society "where touchstone of conduct is success, and in which humanity has to accommodate itself to the claims of expediency, there is no place for *Falstaff*", a loyal human-being. This sentiment is so true even after centuries.

Shakespeare united the three main streams of literature:

- Verse
- Poetry and
- Drama.

To the versification of the English language, he imparted his eloquence and variety giving highest expressions with elasticity of language. The second, the sonnets and poetry, was bound in structure. He imparted economy and intensity to the language. In the third and the most important area, the drama, he saved the language from vagueness and vastness and infused actuality and vividness. Shakespeare's work in prose, poetry, and drama marked the beginning of modernization of English language by introduction of words and expressions, style and form to the language.

Standardization of the English language

The writings of Shakespeare actually influenced the English language, as his works contributed to standardize English language rules and grammar in the 17th and 18th centuries. The words and phrases that he wrote were embedded in the language especially in "A Dictionary of the English Language" by Samuel Johnson. The introduction of new words as well as phrases had greatly enriched the English language, which made it more expressive and colorful. Some believe that Shakespeare was the first to use about 1,700 words – words that he created by borrowing from other languages, changing verbs into adjectives or nouns and vice versa, adding suffixes and prefixes and connecting other words as well as creating new ones. He had several phrases that are still very much a part of today's language and conversation such as full circle, a sorry sight, strange bedfellow and seen better days.

Invented words

Let us explore some more of the common words the world's pre-eminent playwright created.

- ❖ Gloomy was formerly a verb that Shakespeare turned into an adjective. He used this in Titus Andronicus. In Merchant of Venice, he introduced the word laughable. Majestic was from the word "majesty" that first used in the 1300s, while "majestical" was used initially around the 1570s. Shakespeare used the word majestic in The Tempest.
- ❖ In the 1400s, the word "alone" was shortened to lone. From this word, he created the word lonely which he used in the early 17th century tragedy, Coriolanus. He introduced the term "radiance" in King Lear, which originated from "radiantem," the Latin word for beaming. Hurry was a word that is found in Henry VI Part I while generous, which came from the Latin word generosus or "of noble birth" was first used in Hamlet.
- ❖ Honest, worthy, proper and useful are the terms associated with "frugi" the Latin word that became frugal, which was used in a passage in Much Ado About Nothing. Critical was first used in Othello.
- ❖ In the 1570s, the phrase "to court" means to woo. From this word Shakespeare created the word courtship which he used in The Merchant of Venice.
- ❖ In Love's Labour's Lost, he introduced the word zany, derived from the Latin term "zani" that came from "Zanni," a derivative of the Italian name, Giovanni. It means idiosyncratic and amusingly unconventional.

In his comedy, The Taming of the Shrew, Shakespeare used the word undress while rant was first seen in Hamlet. It came from the Dutch term "randten" that means talking foolishly.

Here are some more words first used in his writings

There is no doubt that William Shakespeare had a great influence not only in theater and films and other poets and novelists, but also in the English language, with words that we use every day. Many may not even know that it was him who invented or

coined these words. Literally there are thousands of words that Shakespeare invented that we still use today. Who do you think invented the words manager, fashionable, eyeball, laughable, gloomy or lonely, among others?

William Shakespeare has knowledge of seven languages and usually made direct quotes in other languages directly in the plays that he wrote. It is incredible that he had a vocabulary of 24,000 words, the most for any writer, then and now.

William Shakespeare's contributions to English literature

Shakespeare made many contributions to English Literature and one of the ones that affects us every day is his contribution to the English language.

- a) In fact, Shakespeare actually frequently made up his own words, which still live on in the English language today. Scholars point out that Shakespeare is responsible for coining about 1,700 of the English words found in our 25,000 word-long English vocabulary. The article "Words Shakespeare Invented" by Amanda Mabillard contains a list of a few words Shakespeare coined.
- b) William Shakespeare added about 1,700 words to the English language by invention or combination and by borrowing roots from other languages. In his plays, he created highly complex characters with rich interiority and constructed enduring plots that have become touchstones for much of English literature since. He helped to popularize the English sonnet form, which is also known as the Shakespearean sonnet because of his fame and influence.
- c) Shakespeare has had an enormous influence on English literature. Shakespeare, who was never afraid to innovate, contributed more than 1,700 words to the English language. More importantly, he innovated with character. For example, Hamlet has been called the first modern play because of the intense interiority of its title character. Hamlet is always thinking, and the audience is allowed to hear those thoughts through his many soliloquies.
- d) Shakespeare had a deep understanding of people from all walks of life and created deeply imagined, well-rounded characters, so human they can seem nonfictional, the subjects of his plays sank deeply into the psyches of many great writers, as well as into the hearts of anyone else who experienced his work. His plots were also very well known, and by the late eighteenth century, he was revered even though he broke all the rules of Classical drama. Thus, writers frequently allude to him, to the point that unfamiliarity with Shakespeare can rob readers of much of the allusive richness of English literature.

A contemporary parallel to Shakespeare's influence would be The Wizard of Oz. This work has so permeated the American consciousness that most Americans understand immediately what such allusions as "we're not in Kansas anymore" or "the witch is dead" mean without needing them explained or told where they come from.

Likewise, allusions to Shakespeare show up everywhere in English literature, high literature and low. For example, in Jane Austen's Emma, considered one of the great novels in English, Emma quotes A Midsummer's Night Dream. In popular literature, Agatha Christie's mysteries, such as Something Wicked This Way Comes, allude to Shakespeare. One could make a pastime of locating Shakespeare allusions in English literature and find them all over.

One word Shakespeare is known to have coined is the word accused. He took the Greek prefix acou-, acous-, acouso-, or acoust-, meaning "denotes hearing," which was already being used in Late Middle English, and combined it with the past tense ending -ed to refer to those who are on trial are those who need a hearing to determine their guilt or innocence (Prefix Dictionary, Oxford Dictionaries Online). Shakespeare first coined the word accused in the play Richard II, Act I, Scene I, when, speaking of those who are being formally charged of treason, King Richard II says:

Then call them to our presence; face to face,
And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear
The accuser and the accused freely speak. (I.i.16-18)

The word unreal was also coined by Shakespeare. He took the Latin prefix *un-* meaning "not" or "deprived of" and combined it with the Latin word *realis* being used in Late Middle English as a word in legal terminology meaning "relating to things, especially real property" (Prefix Dictionary; Oxford Dictionaries Online). The word unreal first appears in Macbeth in Act III, Scene IV when Macbeth exclaims of the ghost of Banquo, "Hence, horrible shadow! / Unreal mockery, hence!" (III.iv. 106-07).

Literature

England had a strong tradition of literature in the English vernacular, which gradually increased as English use of the printing press became common during the mid 16th century. This tradition of literature written in English vernacular largely began with the Protestant Reformation's call to let people interpret the Bible for themselves instead of accepting the Catholic Church's interpretation.

- i. Another early proponent of literature in the vernacular was Roger Ascham, who was tutor to Princess Elizabeth during her teenage years, and is now often called the "father of English prose." He proposed that speech was the greatest gift to man from God and to speak or write poorly was an affront. By the time of Elizabethan literature, a vigorous literary culture in both drama and poetry included poets such as Edmund Spenser, whose verse epic .
- ii. The Faerie Queene had a strong influence on English literature but was eventually overshadowed by the lyrics of William Shakespeare, Thomas Wyatt and others. Typically, the works of these playwrights and poets circulated in manuscript form for some time before they were published, and above all the plays of English Renaissance theatre were the outstanding legacy of the period.
- iii. The works of this period are also affected by Henry VIII's declaration of independence from the Catholic Church and technological advances in sailing and cartography, which are reflected in the generally nonreligious themes and various shipwreck adventures of Shakespeare.
- iv. The English theatre scene, which performed both for the court and nobility in private performances and a very wide public in the theatres, was the most crowded in Europe, with a host of other playwrights as well as the giant figures of Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Elizabeth herself was a product of Renaissance humanism trained by Roger Ascham, and wrote occasional poems such as "On Monsieur's Departure" at critical moments of her life.
- v. Philosophers and intellectuals included Thomas More and Francis Bacon. All the 16th century Tudor monarchs were highly educated, as was much of the nobility, and Italian literature had a considerable following, providing the sources for many of Shakespeare's plays.
- vi. English thought advanced towards modern science with the Baconian Method, a forerunner of the Scientific Method. The language of the Book of Common Prayer, first published in 1549, and at the end of the period the Authorised Version ("King James Version" to Americans) of the Bible (1611) had enduring impacts on the English consciousness.

Influence on the English language

Shakespeare's writings greatly influenced the entire English language. Prior to and during Shakespeare's time, the grammar and rules of English were not standardized. But once Shakespeare's plays became popular in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, they helped contribute to the standardization of the English language, with many Shakespearean words and phrases becoming embedded in the English language.

particularly through projects such as Samuel Johnson's A Dictionary of the English Language which quoted Shakespeare more than any other writer. He expanded the scope of English literature by introducing new words and phrases, experimenting with blank verse, and also introducing new poetic and grammatical structures. He also inspired modern terms commonly used in the twenty-first century, such as the word "swag", which derives from "swagger", first seen in the text of his plays Henry V and A Midsummer Night's Dream..

(a). Vocabulary

Among Shakespeare's greatest contributions to the English language must be the introduction of new vocabulary and phrases which have enriched the language making it more colourful and expressive. Some estimates at the number of words coined by Shakespeare number in the several thousands. Warren King clarifies by saying that, "In all of his work – the plays, the sonnets and the narrative poems – Shakespeare uses 17,677 words: Of those, 1,700 were first used by Shakespeare." He is also well known for borrowing from the classical literature and foreign languages. He created these words by "changing nouns into verbs, changing verbs into adjectives, connecting words never before used together, adding prefixes and suffixes, and devising words wholly original." Many of Shakespeare's original phrases are still used in conversation and language today. These include, but are not limited to; "seen better days, strange bedfellows, a sorry sight," and "full circle". Shakespeare added a considerable number of words to the English language when compared to additions to English vocabulary made in other times. Shakespeare helped to further develop style and structure to an otherwise loose, spontaneous language.

While it is true that Shakespeare created many new words (the Oxford English Dictionary records over 2,000), an article in *National Geographic* points out the findings of historian Jonathan Hope who wrote in "Shakespeare's 'Native English'" that "the Victorian scholars who read texts for the first edition of the OED paid special attention to Shakespeare: his texts were read more thoroughly, and cited more often, so he is often credited with the first use of words, or senses of words, which can, in fact, be found in other writers."

(b). Blank Verse

Many critics and scholars consider Shakespeare's first plays experimental, and believe the playwright was still learning from his own mistakes. Gradually his language followed the "natural process of artistic growth, to find its adequate projection in dramatic form". As he continued experimenting, his style of writing found many manifestations in plays. The dialogues in his plays were written in verse form and followed a decasyllabic rule. In *Titus Andronicus*, decasyllables have been used throughout. "There is considerable pause; and though the inflexibility of the line sound is little affected by it, there is a certain running over of sense". His work is still experimental in *Titus Andronicus*. However, in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Comedy of Errors*, there is "perfect metre-abundance of rime [rhyme], plenty of prose, arrangement in stanza". After these two comedies, he kept experimenting until he reached a maturity of style. "Shakespeare's experimental use of trend and style, as well as the achieved development of his blank verses, are all evidences of his creative invention and influences". Through experimentation of tri-syllabic substitution and decasyllabic rule he developed the blank verse to perfection and introduced a new style. "Shakespeare's blank verse is one of the most important of all his influences on the way the English language was written. He used the blank verse throughout in his writing career experimenting and perfecting it. The free speech rhythm gave Shakespeare more freedom for experimentation. "Adaptation of free speech rhythm to the fixed blank-verse framework is an outstanding feature of Shakespeare's poetry". The striking choice of words in common place blank verse influenced "the run of the verse itself, expanding into images which eventually seem to bear significant repetition, and to form, with the presentation of character and action correspondingly developed, a more subtle and suggestive unity". Expressing emotions and situations in form of a verse gave a natural flow to language with an added sense of flexibility and spontaneity.

(c). Poetry

He introduced in poetry two main factors – "verbal immediacy and the moulding of stress to the movement of living emotion". Shakespeare's words reflected passage of time with "fresh, concrete vividness" giving the reader an idea of the time frame. His remarkable capacity to analyze and express emotions in simple words was noteworthy:

When my love swears that she is made of truth,
I do believe her, though I know she lies–

— (Sonnet CXXXVIII)

In the sonnet above, he has expressed in very simple words "complex and even contradictory attitudes to a single emotion".

The sonnet form was limited structurally, in theme and in expressions. Liveliness of Shakespeare's language and strict discipline of the sonnets imparted economy and intensity to his writing style. "It encouraged the association of compression with depth of content and variety of emotional response to a degree unparalleled in English". Complex human emotions found simple expressions in Shakespeare's language.

Conclusion

Shakespeare's influence extends from theatre and literatures to present-day movies, Western philosophy, and the English language itself. William Shakespeare is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the history of the English language, and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He transformed European theatre by expanding expectations about what could be accomplished through innovation in characterization, plot, language and genre. Shakespeare's writings have also impacted many notable novelists and poets over the years, including Herman Melville, Charles Dickens, and Maya Angelou, and continue to influence new authors even today. Shakespeare is the most quoted writer in the history of the English-speaking world after the various writers of the Bible; many of his quotations and neologisms have passed into everyday usage in English and other languages.

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