# Lecture 1 STYLISTIC DIFFERENTIATION

# OF THE ENGLISH VOCABULARY

SEMINAR OUTLINE

* Stylistic differentiation of the English vocabulary.
* Subgroups of special literary vocabulary.
* Subgroups of special colloquial vocabulary.

# Stylistic differentiation of the English vocabulary

The word-stock of any language can be presented as a system, the elements of which are interconnected, interrelated and yet independent. In stylistic classification the difference should be drawn between neutral and stylistically coloured words.

Y.M Skrebnev suggests dividing the vocabulary into neutral, superneutral, subneutral with further gradations (degrees): minimal, medial and maximal. Superneutral vocabulary is characterized by different degrees of elevation, which is observed in bookish, official and poetic words. Subneutral vocabulary reveals degradation of linguistic meanings and is found in colloquial words, jargon, slang, nonce-words and vulgar words.

I.R. Galperin divides the English vocabulary into three main layers: the literary layer, the neutral layer, the colloquial layer. The literary and the colloquial layers contain – correspondingly – common literary and common colloquial words, which together with the neutral layer comprise the standard English vocabulary. It is the special literary and special colloquial groups of vocabulary that are of major interest to stylistic research.

# Special literary vocabulary

Special literary vocabulary includes: terms, archaic, poetic and historical words, foreign words and barbarisms, literary coinages.

**A Term** is directly connected with the concept it denotes. The basic function of terms in professional sphere is to bear exact reference to a given concept. When used in other styles terms perform expressive or aesthetic functions. They indicate

the technical peculiarities of the subject; make reference to the occupation of the character; create the true-to-life atmosphere of the narration; suggest the author’s erudition; perform parodying function.

**Archaic words** – according to the ageing process of words – are subdivided into three groups by I.R. Galperin: obsolescent, obsolete and archaisms proper. Obsolescent words are words rarely used, such as morphological archaisms (*thee, thou, he maketh, makest, wilt, heretofore*). Obsolete words are out of use, but still recognized by the English speakers (*methinks, nay)*. Archaisms proper are no longer recognizable in modern English (*troth*). Archaisms perform different functions: expressive function – in historical novels, while maintaining local color and realistic background; satirical function **–** consisting in unexpected use of high-flown wording in trivial situation; terminological function – in the style of official documents where morphological archaisms maintain the exactness of expression (*hereby*, *theretofore*).

**Poetic words** are mostly archaic or very rarely used highly literary words (*quoth*, *eftsoons*, *welkin*). The main function of poetic words is to sustain the elevated atmosphere of poetry, to create the so-called *poetic heightening*.

Archaisms should be distinguished from **historical words** which perform nominative function and denote institutions, customs, material objects which are no longer in use (*goblet*, *mace*). Historical words create the realistic background to historical novels.

**Barbarisms** are words of foreign origin which have not entirely been assimilated into the English language. Most barbarisms have corresponding English synonyms: *chic* (stylish), *de facto* (actually), *faux pas* (an embarrassing error). While barbarisms constitute a part of the English word-stock and are generally given in the body of the dictionary, **foreign words** do not belong to the English vocabulary and have no synonyms. The function of foreign words is terminological, as they reflect notions and concepts not existing in English reality (*udarnik*, *kolkhoz*; *blitzkrieg, Luftwaffe*; *hara-kiri*). In printed

works barbarisms and foreign words can be used to supply local colour; to depict conditions of life, customs and habits; to serve as speech characterization; to elevate the language.

**Literary coinages** are neologisms, introduced by writers in their literary works. Such words present a more expressive means of communicating the idea.

# Special colloquial vocabulary

Special colloquial vocabulary includes slang, professional and social jargon words, dialectal words, vulgarisms, colloquial coinages.

**Slang** words are used as intentional substitutes for neutral or elevated words and expressions, they possess humorous or derogatory connotations. The reason for appearance of slang is striving for novelty of expression. Old denominations are replaced by original expressive ones. Old and new slang words co-exist for a while, which makes slang very rich in synonyms. In slang we may observe various figures of speech, such as metaphor: *upper story* (head); metonymy: *skirt* (a girl); hyperbole: *killing* (astonishing); understatement: *some* (excellent); irony: *clear as mud* (confusing); paronomasia: *Gosh* (God). The function of slang words is to escape the dull familiarity of standard words.

**Jargon words** are words used in professional or social groups as informal, often humorous replacers of already existing words. According to V.A. Kucharenko, there are two groups of jargonisms: professional and social.

***Professional jargonisms*** circulate within communities joined by professional interests. They are informal substitutes for official terms in a special field and can be regarded as emotive synonyms to terms. Professionalisms pertain to very specific objects typical of this professional sphere only. Every professional group (or a subculture) has its own jargon: in police jargon – *a wiggle seat* (lie detector), in hard rock music subculture – *crowd surfing* (the process of passing a person overhead from person to person during a concert). The function of professionalisms in emotive prose is to depict the natural speech of a character.

***Social jargonisms*** are found within groups characterized by social integrity. They pertain to objects, concepts and notions of everyday life, they are emotive synonyms to neutral words of the general word-stock. Social jargonisms aim at secrecy and purposefully disguise the meaning of the expressed concept.

The use of **dialectal words** is confined to a definite locality. Most dialectal words deal with the everyday life of the country. The function of dialectal words in emotive prose is to characterize the speaker as a person of a certain locality, breeding, education. Many dialectal words used in literary works are of Scottish origin: *kirk* (church), *loch* (lake), *bonny* (beautiful), *lassie* (girl). Another popular dialect is Cockney dialect (the working-class speech of London), the phonological peculiarities of which are the following: 1) initial [h] sounds are dropped where they should be pronounced (*’ave* (have), *’ope* (hope)) and are inserted in front of words beginning with vowels (*hawful* (awful)); 2) diphthong [ei] is substituted by [ai] (*fyce* (face), *nyme* (name), *tyke* (take)).

**Vulgarisms** are coarse, rude, emotionally strongly charged words and expressions, which are considered too offensive for polite usage. According to Y.M. Skrebnev, there are two groups of vulgarisms – lexical and stylistic. ***Lexical vulgarisms*** (*expletives*) are words which express ideas considered unmentionable in civilized society. The function of expletives is to express strong negative emotions (*damn, bloody*). Here also belong *obscene words*, the use of which is banned in any form of communication as being indecent. All of these words are of Anglo-Saxon origin. ***Stylistic vulgarisms*** are words and phrases, the lexical meanings of which have nothing indecent or improper about them. They express a derogatory attitude of the speaker towards the object of speech, a person, or an idea (*pay dirt* (money)).

**Colloquial coinages** are spontaneous and elusive. Not all of these words are fixed in dictionaries or even in writing. Most of them disappear from the language leaving no trace. Numerous examples can be found in careless colloquial speech.