

Module I. Lecture 7

Abbreviation

Plan

1. Definition
2. Graphical abbreviations
3. Lexical abbreviations

1. Definition

In the process of communication words and word-groups can be shortened. The causes of shortening can be linguistic and extra-linguistic. By extra-linguistic causes changes in the life of people are meant. In Modern English many new abbreviations, acronyms, initials, blends are formed because the tempo of life is increasing and it becomes necessary to give more and more information in the shortest possible time.

There are also linguistic causes of abbreviating words and word-groups, such as the demand of rhythm, which is satisfied in English by monosyllabic words. When borrowings from other languages are assimilated in English they are shortened. Here we have modification of form on the basis of analogy, e.g. the Latin borrowing «fanaticus» is shortened to «fan» on the analogy with native words: man, pan, tan etc.

There are two main types of shortenings : graphical and lexical.

2. Graphical abbreviations

Graphical abbreviations are the result of shortening of words and word-groups only in written speech while orally the corresponding full forms are used. They are used for the economy of space and effort in writing. The oldest group of graphical abbreviations in English is of Latin origin. In Russian this type of abbreviation is not typical. In these abbreviations in the spelling Latin words are shortened, while orally the corresponding English equivalents are pronounced in the full form, e.g. for example (Latin exempli gratia), a.m. - in the morning (ante meridiem), No - number (numero), p.a. - a year (per annum), d - penny (dinarius), lb - pound (libra), i. e. - that is (id est) etc. Some graphical abbreviations of Latin origin have different English equivalents in different contexts, e.g. p.m. can be pronounced «in the afternoon» (post meridiem) and «after death» (post mortem).

There are also graphical abbreviations of native origin, where in the spelling we have abbreviations of words and word-groups of the corresponding English equivalents in the full form. We have several semantic groups of them :

- a) days of the week, e.g. Mon - Monday, Tue - Tuesday etc
- b) names of months, e.g. Apr - April, Aug - August etc.
- c) names of counties in UK, e.g. Yorks - Yorkshire, Berks -Berkshire etc
- d) names of states in USA, e.g. Ala - Alabama, Alas - Alaska etc.
- e) names of address, e.g. Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr. etc.

- f) military ranks, e.g. capt. -captain, col. - colonel, sgt - sergeant etc.
- g) scientific degrees, e.g. B.A. - Bachelor of Arts, D.M. - Doctor of Medicine. (Sometimes in scientific degrees we have abbreviations of Latin origin, e.g., M.B. - Medicinæ Baccalaurus).
- h) units of time, length, weight, e.g. f. / ft -foot/feet, sec. - second, in. -inch, mg. - milligram etc.

The reading of some graphical abbreviations depends on the context, e.g. «m» can be read as: male, married, masculine, metre, mile, million, minute, «l.p.» can be read as long-playing, low pressure.

Initialisms are the bordering case between graphical and lexical abbreviations. When they appear in the language, as a rule, to denote some new offices they are closer to graphical abbreviations because orally full forms are used, e.g. J.V. - joint venture. When they are used for some duration of time they acquire the shortened form of pronouncing and become closer to lexical abbreviations, e.g. BBC is as a rule pronounced in the shortened form. In some cases the translation of initialisms is next to impossible without using special dictionaries. Initialisms are denoted in different ways. Very often they are expressed in the way they are pronounced in the language of their origin, e.g. ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, United States) is given in Russian as АНЗУС, SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) was for a long time used in Russian as СОЛТ, now a translation variant is used (ОСВ -Договор об ограничении стратегических вооружений). This type of initialisms borrowed into other languages is preferable, e.g. UFO - НЛО, СП - JV etc. There are three types of initialisms in English:

- a) initialisms with alphabetical reading, such as UK, BUP, CND etc
- b) initialisms which are read as if they are words, e.g. UNESCO, UNO, NATO etc.
- c) initialisms which coincide with English words in their sound form, such initialisms are called acronyms, e.g. CLASS (Computer-based Laboratory for Automated School System).

Some scientists unite groups b) and c) into one group which they call acronyms. Some initialisms can form new words in which they act as root morphemes by different ways of wordbuilding:

- a) affixation, e.g. AWALism, ex-rafer, ex- POW, to waafize, AIDSophobia etc.
- b) conversion, e.g. to raff, to fly IFR (Instrument Flight Rules),
- c) composition, e.g. STOLport, USAFman etc.
- d) there are also compound-shortened words where the first component is an initial abbreviation with the alphabetical reading and the second one is a complete word, e.g. A-bomb, U-pronunciation, V -day etc. In some cases the first component is a complete word and the second component is an initial abbreviation with the alphabetical pronunciation, e.g. Three -Ds (Three dimensions).

3. Lexical abbreviations

Abbreviation of words consists in clipping a part of a word. As a result we get a new lexical unit where either the lexical meaning or the style is different from the full form of the word. In such cases as »fantasy» and «fancy», «fence» and

«defence» we have different lexical meanings. In such cases as «laboratory» and «lab», we have different styles.

Abbreviation does not change the part-of-speech meaning, as we have it in the case of conversion or affixation, it produces words belonging to the same part of speech as the primary word, e.g. prof is a noun and professor is also a noun. Mostly nouns undergo abbreviation, but we can also meet abbreviation of verbs, such as to rev from to revolve, to tab from to tabulate etc. But mostly abbreviated forms of verbs are formed by means of conversion from abbreviated nouns, e.g. to taxi, to vac etc. Adjectives can be abbreviated but they are mostly used in school slang and are combined with suffixation, e.g. comfy, dilly, mizzy etc. As a rule pronouns, numerals, interjections, conjunctions are not abbreviated. The exceptions are: fif (fifteen), teen-ager, in one's teens (apheresis from numerals from 13 to 19).

Lexical abbreviations are classified according to the part of the word which is clipped. Mostly the end of the word is clipped, because the beginning of the word in most cases is the root and expresses the lexical meaning of the word. This type of abbreviation is called apocope. Here we can mention a group of words ending in «o», such as disco (dicothèque), expo (exposition), intro (introduction) and many others. On the analogy with these words there developed in Modern English a number of words where «o» is added as a kind of a suffix to the shortened form of the word, e.g. combo (combination) - небольшой эстрадный ансамбль, Afro (African) -прическа под африканца etc. In other cases the beginning of the word is clipped. In such cases we have apheresis, e.g. chute (parachute), varsity (university), copter (helicopter) , thuse (enthuse) etc. Sometimes the middle of the word is clipped, e.g. mart (market), fanzine (fan magazine) maths (mathematics). Such abbreviations are called syncope. Sometimes we have a combination of apocope with apheresis, when the beginning and the end of the word are clipped, e.g. tec (detective), van (avanguard) etc. Sometimes shortening influences the spelling of the word, e.g. «c» can be substituted by «k» before «e» to preserve pronunciation, e.g. mike (microphone), Coke (coca-cola) etc. The same rule is observed in the following cases: fax (facsimile), teck (technical college), trunk (tranquilizer) etc. The final consonants in the shortened forms are substituted by letters characteristic of native English words.

Questions for discussion

1. Give the definition and examples of English abbreviations
2. What are the main criteria in abbreviating words and word-groups?
3. How are the abbreviations classified?
4. How are graphical abbreviations formed? Give examples
5. What does the term “Initialisms” mean?
6. Characterize the lexical abbreviations. Give examples

References

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