

Project #3: Lexicon Study

100 pts

Description: Part 1: a breakdown etymologies posted on blackboard

Part 2: a 2-3 page literary analysis that focuses on the breakdown of the etymologies.

Due:

Goal: To analyze the etymological breakdown of a text's lexicon in order to make an argument about how the word choice influences the style and register and why the author might have chosen the words as s/he did.

Assignment: In their discussion of stylistics, Ann Cuzan and Michael Adams state that "Registers are varieties of language defined by use, as opposed to dialects, which are varieties defined by user. A register like 'Business English' is typical of text types or genres like the commercial letter and the résumé; a register like 'Journalese' is typical of text types like the editorial and the feature story. But *register* can be identified not only by genre but by social level or mode as well: most of us speak in an informal register among family and friends but in a formal register (at least some of the time) at school or work." Thus registers will change in various contexts but also when the speaker/writer wishes to create a particular effect or relate to her/his audience in a particular way. One thing that helps create a register in English is the balance of the etymologies of the words an author chooses: a predominance of native English words creates a different register than a large number of words borrowed from Latin or other languages. For this assignment, you will analyze a passage of your choice, paying close attention to the register, by explaining how the author's word choice helps you understand the text.

Part 1: Choose a passage from a text of your choice that is approximately 150 words long and look up the etymology of every word in the OED (go back to the language that English borrows it from – so a word that was borrowed from French has a French etymology, even though the French word comes from Latin; also, don't go past the *extant* [existing in a text] language – so give OE for native words, not Germanic). This passage could be from any medium you would like (a novel, a textbook, an article in a popular magazine, an article in a newspaper, someone's blog, the script of a film, a personal narrative, a poem, a song, etc). Create a breakdown of the etymologies and post it to blackboard (see below for what your post should look like).

When you post it on the discussion board, title your thread with both the title of the work and the genre.

Part 2: Write a 2-3 page analysis of the register of your text. After everyone is done with part one, you will have many other word breakdowns in other texts and types of texts for a point of comparison. Part of your analysis will compare what your author does to what other authors in a similar genre do or to what the trends are in other types of genres. You should also look specifically at some of the word choices in your passage. Is the balance of etymologies in your passage similar to or different from your classmates'? If there is a particularly important word, what is its etymology and why might that be important? If the author shows a trend toward words with one type of etymology, is there a word or a phrase that stands out as different? Why might the author have done that? Does the whole passage have the same register or are there shifts in register? Ultimately, you want to have an argument about how the author chooses a register that is appropriate for his or her genre and/or audience overall and text in particular, and also how the particulars of the passage can help you analyze what the author is trying to do at that moment.

Criteria for Evaluation:

- Summary of Etymologies
 - Complete: include every word and take derivational affixes into account.
 - Accurate: correctly identify the etymologies of each word.
- Analysis:
 - Argument: make a clear and specific argument about your passage (i.e., have a thesis).
 - Details: go beyond broad generalizations to make detailed observations about the word choice in the text.
 - Complications: pay attention to and account for any unexpected details.

- Organization: the paper should have tight paragraph structure that shows a logical development of ideas.
- Finishing and works cited: Error-free writing with correct citation and proper works cited list.

Sample Summary of Etymologies:

Text:

Hobbits are an unobtrusive but very ancient people, more numerous formerly than they are today; for they love peace and quiet and good tilled earth.

Summary of Etymologies

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. New York, Ballantine Books, 1965. 19.

An: OE

Ancient: French

And (2x): OE

Are (2x): OE

But: OE

Earth: OE

For: OE

Formerly: former: OE; -ly: OE

Good: OE

Hobbits: made up by Tolkien

Love: OE

More: OE

Numerous: Latin

Peace: French

People: French

Quiet: French

Than: OE

They (2x): ON

Tilled: OE

Today: to: OE; day: OE

Unobtrusive: un-: OE; obtrusive: Latin

Very: French

Breakdown:

OE: 18 (64.3%)

ON: 2 (7.1%)

French: 5 (17.8%)

Latin: 2 (7.1%)

Neologism: 1 (3.6%)

Total: 28