FUNCTIONAL SHIFT IN ENGLISH

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Not the origin of the word, but its fitness for the occasion must determine its use."¹ English teachers for many years have been teaching that a word is not a part of speech until it is used in a sentence; then its use in the sentence determines the part of speech. The purpose of this study will be to make an investigation of the shifting of a word from one part of speech to another, to see whether this linguistic process existed in Old English, Middle English, and to note the prevalence of functional shift among present-day writers. This study will try to determine whether the American people are the masters or the slaves of their language, since

Words live only as they are spoken or written. They enter a language in response to a need; they disappear, either suddenly or gradually, when they are no longer needed. Their 'life' consists in the measure of their necessity to the language.²

Therefore, since the shifting of parts of speech is a common practice, grammarians may have to accept many of these changes through the custom of good usage. Even though change is

¹George H. McKeag, English Words and Their Background, p. 161.

prevalent, there is one class of people—the schoolmarm, the strait-laced kind—who have attempted to enforce eighteenth century ideals of purism in the language. "To this day, in fact, she [The schoolmarm] clings to the doctrine that there is such a thing as 'correct English'; that its principles have been laid down for all by the English purists, and that she is under moral obligation to inculcate it."\(^3\)

A similar idea was expressed by Fries in his discussion of modern linguistics when he wondered that the changes in the sciences other than linguistics have been accepted and welcomed in the modern schools, "... but in the matter of language, eighteenth century authoritarian attitudes and naive and pre-scientific views still continued and vigorously resisted any correction by scientific procedures."\(^4\)

But the general attitude in circles of teachers is not the issue of science so much as it is of conservatives versus radicals. The conservatives are those who stand for correctness, and insist

... that it is the part of the schools to teach language according to rule... rather than to encourage questionable liberties of usage. The radicals are thought of as those who would follow an easier path and accept all sorts of 'errors' whenever those 'errors' are

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\(^3\)H. L. Mencken, *American Language, Supplement I*, p. 163.

widespread—a policy which the 'conservatives' believe would undermine the defenses against 'the wretched English heard everywhere' and allow the floods of crudity to wipe out all accuracy of expression and sensitivity to elegance.\(^5\)

However, Fries stated further in regard to the teachers, "In our schools are hosts of excellent teachers, with high ideals, devoted to the best interests of their pupils."\(^6\) But he pointed out that much time and effort are wasted in endless drill on grammar rules which have not been revised since the eighteenth century. "It is a harmful practice because the habits set up and the views inculcated turn the students away from the only source of real knowledge—the actual language of the people about them."\(^7\)

But many grammarians of today are becoming more tolerant of change in the language, and they "have learned by their studies that every healthy language has ways of its own, and that those of vernacular American are very far from those of Johnsonese English."\(^8\)

A close scrutiny into the nature of functional shift, or conversion, is necessary in order to understand and accept a process which has been functioning since the early days of the English language. "Linguistic wisdom begins with the consciousness that words can be and are used to represent

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 323. \(^6\)Ibid., p. 327.  
\(^7\)Ibid. \(^8\)Mencken, op. cit., p. 163.
different aspects of ever-changing experiences."

With each new edition of the dictionary becoming more voluminous, people may find a copious supply of words to express almost any thought; so it is not because of the lack of words, in present English usage, which fosters functional shift, but rather "a desire for freshness and vivacity of expression." 

Words move and change from age to age and from mouth to mouth; they seldom stay the same. "They take on colour, intensity, and vivacity from the infection of neighborhood; the same word is of several shapes and diverse imports in one and the same sentence." The same word is used in these locutions: "a fine day" and "fine irony"; in "fair trade" and "a fair goddess." " Were different symbols to be invented for these sundry meanings the art of literature would perish. That is a fundamental truth of language and especially of English." 

Many words in the English language are looked upon as free agents as far as their grammatical categories are concerned. Nouns which have had a long usage in their function in a sentence are shifted so that verbs result, such as to tomahawk, to table, to author, to box, to thumb, to boot.

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9Irving J. Lee, Language Habits in Human Affairs, p. 36.
12Ibid., p. 53.
The reverse shift takes place and verbs of long standing are used for nouns as stand-in, stand-off, hair-do, hideaway.13

In fact, in present-day English with the marked loss of inflection, and the absence of much formal distinction in parts of speech, it is very simple to change a word into a different function. In such an expression as "to give a person a dig in the ribs," dig is no longer a verb but becomes a noun even though "the speaker of Modern English still feels that the word is 'properly' a verb."14 But this may be the reason that dig as a noun is seldom used in the plural. The opposite is true in a sentence of this kind "She looks after the poor of her parish" because poor has been converted from the adjective poor, but it is not used in a singular sense.15 Other instances are to be found in which adjectives are used as plural nouns for both persons and things as "Very well then, I'll take you, my dears" and "The little disagreeables of life."16 Then adjectives can be used to denote languages as "French is taught as the first foreign language."17 In a similar sense adjectives are used to refer to the people of a country, "No Irish need apply" and "pursued by the advancing French and British."18

13Richard D. Mallery, Our American Language, p. 4.
16Ibid., p. 108.
17Ibid., p. 108.
18Ibid., p. 109.
Verbal adjectives or participles are shifted to nouns as "Teaching should be determined by the needs of the taught" and "If there is a joke, he would be in it, one of the laughers, not one of the laughed at." 19 Adjectives are also used as neuter nouns with the definite article, "We want to distinguish between the false and the true," and attributive adjectives are converted into nouns denoting the person possessing the quality when they are thought of as a whole class as "The poor never lost a right without being congratulated by the rich on gaining something better." 20

The shifting of adjectives is not restricted to nouns, for sometimes they become verbs as to idle, to round, to square, to thin, to pale, to dry, to cool. That is the case in this instance, "There wasn't one of us that was fit to speak to him, to look at him, to black his boots." 21 Also a great many words are used both as adjectives and as adverbs; therefore it is difficult to decide whether the word is primarily an adjective or an adverb. Then, too, the same form may serve as both parts of speech, "The wall of the ravine showed ghostly grey, then faintly pink." 22 An adverb becomes an adjective in "the off horse," "the then bishop," and "waiting for the down mail to Falmouth." 23 But in a comparative

19 Ibid., p. 99. 20 Ibid., pp. 98-100.
21 Ibid., p. 118. 22 Ibid., p. 119.
23 George P. Krapp, Modern English, p. 198.
and superlative sense the adjective again may become a noun as "A wiser than she. . .," "He was thinking his hardest," and "The steps are at their steepest just here."²⁴

Proper nouns have long been used as adjectives in such instances as "A Shakespearian scholar," "Victorian literature," "The Norman kings," and "The Turkish trade."²⁵ Even though nouns are often used as verbs, the use of verbs as nouns is limited. Almost any noun may be used as a verb as to cudgel, to powder, to oil, to wall in, to brick up, to bell (a cat), to water, to paper, to man, to chaperone, to mother.²⁶ Such instances as these are more or less common: "I found myself invalided out of the army" and "The inspector motored back to Scotland Yards."²⁷ Modern instances of this noun-to-verb shift are also found in such expressions as to letter, to major, to air (radio), to wax (record for phonograph), to postcard, to dog-house, to by-line, to brain-trust. The meaning of to goose is known to all school boys, but it is not found in the dictionaries. Goosey has been recognized as meaning "touchy, nervous";²⁸ however, no analogies in any European language, not even in England, are found for the American usage as in "Jack goosed Jim and caused him to disturb the class with his jumping."

²⁴Kruisinga, op. cit., p. 111. ²⁵Ibid., p. 141.
²⁶Ibid., p. 387. ²⁷Ibid.
²⁸Mencken, op. cit., p. 389.
Not a few of the more recent verb-from-nouns meet genuine needs, and deserve to be treated with more seriousness than they usually get, e.g., to thumb, to audition, to co-star, to curb, to secretary, to deadhead, to highlight, to intern, to model, to service, to alert, to night-club, to first-name. 29

Even an adjective-noun combination may appear, "To cold-shoulder a person." 30 Then the less frequent shift of verb to noun is seen in "She had a good cry," "Give me a lift," "He is always on the go." By the side of the noun bath the verb bathe has given rise to the noun bathe [bēθ], with the idea of bathing in running water as in this sentence, "The book makes the reader feel pleasant, rather as one feels after a cozy hot bath than after a bathe in a windy sea." 31 This phonological shift is found in other words with variant sounds, even though there may be little or no difference in the orthography of the words. Some examples of these words are clothes [ˈklows] with transferred meaning; clothes [ˈklɔz] or [ˈkloʊz]. Then there is the word house as a noun [haus] but as a verb [ˈhaus]; also the word use as a noun becomes [juːs], but as a verb is [juːz]. 32

Some people still frown on this shift of verb to noun: an invite, a deal, a win, a combine. More acceptable seems to be the shifting of transitive verbs to intransitive verbs

29Ibid., p. 387.  30Kruisinga, op. cit., p. 122.
31Ibid., p. 125.
and vice versa as "I stood the candle upon the floor" and "The bath filled slowly"; also, to walk a horse" and "to jump a fence," and then the transitive to intransitive "I don't sing, but I am fond of playing."  

Next, it may be noted that irregular verbs, being traditional in living English, are slowly disappearing. This explains why in many cases regular forms exist by the side of the traditional ones, and why verbs converted from nouns, even when the noun is identical in form with an irregular verb, take the regular suffix as in pen and shine. To pen, as a converted noun meaning to write is always regular. The form penned, "enclosed," is pronounced perhaps as a converted noun. When used as an adjective, it is most frequently .

The adverb frequently shifts to other parts of speech; sometimes it becomes a noun, "The ups and downs of life"; sometimes, an adjective, "In the light of after events one cannot."; and more frequently in the present-day usage, as a verb, "As we neared Binz, the road..." and "He up and awayed to London."  

Another combination with the use of the adverb is the verb plus the adverb which results in a substantive element.

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33Kruisinga, op. cit., p. 126.  
34Krapp, op. cit., p. 198.  
35Kruisinga, op. cit., p. 6.  
36Ibid., p. 4.  
37Ibid., p. 127.
Many of these are on a level below that of standard speech, but they are in current use in the jargon of sports, industry, journalism, politics, salesmanship, and general colloquial. There are a few which are firmly established on the standard level, castaway, farewell, go-between, passover, and runaway.38 Nevertheless, some of the same combinations are below the standard level, such as layaway, lay off, kick off, hangout,39 know-how, kickback, build-up, come-down, hang-over.40

From these instances the nature of functional shift or conversion becomes evident as the shifting or changing of one word from its accepted part of speech into a new usage, either as a different part of speech or as a new function in the same part of speech. "Language, for all its scattered profuseness, is an economical function. It does not hesitate to use, for new things or ideas, old words, and to spread those words as wide and as thin as is consistent with understanding."41

Sometimes groups of words must be taken together as a function group in order to be classified in grammatical terms.42 However, book grammar is sometimes misleading and even false since a grammar is really a skeleton of some period which is past. "To set book grammar up as a test and the

39 Ibid., p. 117. 40 H. M. McNeely, op. cit., p. 327.
source of authority in language inevitably leads to a stiff, artificial, and unexpressive use of language. The real guide to good grammar, to good English in all reports, is to be found in the living speech.  

Because of the shifting of a word from one part of speech to another, some grammarians advocate the complete abolishment of the terminology of the parts of speech. But this would be foolish unless a new terminology could be recognized and adopted by all grammarians, for how else can they be understood? "For it is true of the language spoken by grammarians as it is of all language as a whole that generality of usage is the prime test of linguistic value and usefulness."  

In this study of changing words it will be useful to recognize certain levels of usage, for speech, like human behavior, is subject to great variety. Various levels of speech may be set up, but for the purpose of this study four levels will suffice. These levels of speech may be defined as follows:

The illiterate level has no standard except dialect conversation. Example: "If I had of come, he wouldn't of done it."

The homely level is outside the limits of standard cultivated usage, yet not completely illiterate. Example: "He don't come anymore."

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43 Ibid., p. 224.

The standard level includes the language of the people between the homely level and the literary level. This, in fact, is the language. It includes both informal and formal speech, that is, the conversational style and the more dignified form of written English.

The literary level seeks a higher level than the standard level by the use of effectiveness, forcefulness, symmetry, and balance in expression.\(^{45}\)

Even though these levels of usage are clearly defined and very distinctive in meaning, one person does not remain on the same speech level at all times just as he does not wear a bathing suit or an evening dress at all times.

An intelligent speaker who realizes fully... that language is both a vehicle for conveying thoughts and emotions to others and a means of impressing his fellow-man for good or bad will train himself to adapt his language to the needs of the situation in which he happens to find himself.\(^{46}\)

Standard English depends upon various factors since the language is an ever changing and never fully attained ideal toward which the English-speaking race is always striving. Kennedy suggested these linguistic standards as just and fair ideals by which the language may be judged:\(^{47}\)

1. Generality of usage does much toward the establishing of a word.

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\(^{46}\)Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

\(^{47}\)Ibid., pp. 17-20.
2. Any word which satisfies a real need, a need not satisfied otherwise, is an acceptable and important member of the linguistic society.

3. The length of time a word has been used establishes it in good usage. Many slang words do not stay in use long enough to become acceptable.

4. The standard of the best writers and speakers has a marked influence on the public. Some words rise from a low to a higher level, as discard, a gambler's term.

5. There should be a test to see whether the word conforms to good English usage, in adding inflectional endings, -s, -ed, -t.

6. The historical background of a word should carry some weight.

7. Locutions are selected with the most pleasing combinations of sounds.

In looking back over the evidences of functional shift already mentioned, the reader can see that this is a process in the evolution of the living language which many linguists and grammarians have noted.

When Sweet used the term conversion in his New English Grammar, in 1892, he was one of the first grammarians to employ the word in its more restricted sense as meaning 'change in function or construction.' But since the turn of the century, grammarians have increasingly realized the importance of the practice of shifting a word from one part of speech to another without change in form.48

This study will make a brief historical survey of functional shift in Old English, Middle English, and Modern English; then it will take a glance at functional shift in poetic and figurative language based on a very narrow field of poetry; finally a more detailed study will be made of functional shift in the present day in a few newspapers, magazines and some modern fiction.

Linguistic scientists have not yet been able to give a complete account of all the causes of semantic change—or any other type change, for that matter—but it will be helpful to consider some of the elements which play a part in it.49

Possibly the best reason for language changes may be found in the fact that things or objects themselves as well as people are subject to change. "The static word is essentially a psychological habit of symbolization and reference whose seat is in the human mind itself. A change in the vocabulary is, therefore, nothing but a change in the symbolizing and referential habits of a group of human beings."50

49 Albert H. Marckwardt, Introduction to the English Language, p. 171.

50 William L. Graff, Language and Languages, p. 292.
CHAPTER II

A BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY OF FUNCTIONAL SHIFT

In the early days of the English language there was a need for many new words, and in language, as in other things, necessity is the mother of invention; "when our means are limited, we often develop unusual resourcefulness in utilizing those means to the full. Such resourcefulness is characteristic of Old English."\(^1\) The English language in this early stage showed a great flexibility and a capacity for changing old words to new uses. Sometimes from one root word more than a hundred words were formed; thus Old English was more resourceful in using its native material than Modern English, which has borrowed and assimilated many words from foreign sources.\(^2\)

Donald W. Lee dates the beginning of functional shift with the entry of William the Conqueror into England, 1066, and he said, "There is nothing whatever particularly new or modern about the process."\(^3\) However, there are examples

\(^1\) Albert C. Baugh, A History of the English Language, p. 76.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 77.

which may be cited in the early days of Old English, and he points out some of these in the verb-noun sets from the same root, blōstan and blōstmian, "blossom" and "to blossom"; curs and cursian, "curse" and "to curse"; hearm and hearmian, "harm" and "to harm." In these sets it is reasonably clear that the noun preceded the verb, but in such pairs as help and helpan, "help" and "to help," and giefu and giefan, "gift" and "to give," the noun evidently employs the earlier verb form since these verbs are strong and of Old English origin. 4

Also according to Moore and Anott "most weak verbs in Old English are derived from nouns, from adjectives, or from strong verbs." 5 A few examples are

1. from nouns, dēman, "judge" from Germanic dōm-jan* (cf. O.E. dōm, "judgment")

2. from adjectives, giernan, "desire" from Germanic gern-jan* (cf. O.E. georn, "desirous")

3. from strong verbs, settan, "set" from Germanic sat-jan* (cf. O.E. saet, preterit of sittan, "sit") 6

The reasons for the predominance of the weak type of verb are first its comparative simplicity, as compared with six of seven classes of the strong verbs, and

4 Ibid., p. 2.


6 Ibid.
second, the fact that a noun or other word could be made into a weak verb without destroying its recognizability as the same word, whereas the tense forms of a strong verb could be made only by changing the word beyond recognition. Thus from the noun bottle it is easy to make a weak verb I bottled, I have bottled, but as a strong verb this would have to be something like I bottle, present, I bottle, preterit, I have bottled, past participle.7

In Anglo-Saxon times, the making of new verbs was not a very common process, but it developed very rapidly in Middle English; and new words, predominantly weak, were well-established as the prevailing type or model for verb formations.8

Many of the early changes in the meaning and use of words resulted from a changing way of life; words gradually lost their earlier meaning.

The history of such words as arrive, which once meant "come to shore," and equip, which once meant "fit with a ship," is probably due to similar changes in the conditions of life. At bottom all this is no different from the changes of meaning in such words as house, street, carriage, car, light, hat, coat, shoe, gun, and so on, which every advance in civilization and shift in fashion brings about.9

As more and more of these native nouns and verbs came to be identical in form (blossom, care, drink), and as the same thing happened later with the French words (arm, blame, charge), "it was quite natural that the speech-instinct should

8Ibid., p. 308.
9Leonard Bloomfield, Introduction to the Study of Language, p. 244.
take it as a matter of course that whenever the need of a verb arose, the corresponding noun might be used unchanged, and vice versa."¹⁰

In Old English, an expression like He heom stod wið ("He then stood against" or "He withstood them") seems questionable in the relationship of heom and wið. Now there is no question in present-day English about the relation of against and them, but in Early English prepositions were frequently used as adverbs.¹¹

Also in Old English, the adjective dysig "foolish" was sometimes used as a substantive; in the Gospels la dysega is translated "thou fool."¹² In the Old English version of the "Foolish Virgins" one line is

As pæ ðæ if dysigan nāmōn lēoctfatu ond ne nānne ele mid him; ðā gleawan nāmōn ele on hira. . . . but the five foolish took lamps and took no oil with them; the wise took oil . . . .¹³

On the other hand, one word may take on many meanings as the word board was used in Old English to mean table with food on it. Later it became symbolic of the food upon the table as "paying for one's board" or as a verb "She boards down the street." By association, it has come to mean the

¹⁰Otto Jespersen, Growth and Structure of the English Language, p. 167.
¹¹Bloomfield, op. cit., p. 243.
¹³Moore and Knott, op. cit., p. 45.
people who sit around a table to deliberate as a board of directors. Also in the word wear from the Old English werian, "to be clothed with," many shifts have taken place so that it has two distinct meanings. In the Bible is found "The water wears the stones"; now there is the "face, worn by trouble"; "a dress that is much worn"; and the two opposite meanings, "I want a cloth that will wear" and "I want a cloth that will not wear."\(^\text{14}\)

One of the most common functional shifts, which began in Old English and continued into Chaucer's day, was the substantivation of the adjective. "For the most part in Old English, the adjective was used only as a personal substantive. ... This is done very frequently even in Beowulf."\(^\text{15}\)

A few examples from Beowulf that Kennedy points out are

\begin{quote}
'Häfde se goða! ... line 205;
'Gewat himfæ se hearda' ... line 1964;
'cwæed fæ ælmightiga eordon worhte' ... line 92
\end{quote}

The substantivation of adjectives seems to have been such a gradual process that it is difficult to fix a date, but there are three ways in which this process worked:

(1) the quality of the thing was so striking that the name of the adjective was adopted for the substantive itself--

\(^{14}\) Bradley, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 186-7.


\(^{16}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 252.
"so gold was originally the yellow metal, wheat, the white grain"; (2) ellipsis brought about the process in such locations as almighty, a saint, a sage; (3) finally, the adjectives were used to denote abstract ideas, as good, evil, ill. "When Chaucer says 'A true swynk and a good was he,' we feel that good is, at least partially, a substantive."17

Some of the many examples which are pointed out by Kennedy are as follows:

'A thief he was, forsooth, of corn and mele and and that a sleigh... ' line 20, 'Keeve's Tale'
'This January, the olde... ' line 798, 'Merchant's Tale'
'For such was the fairest under sonne.' line 6, 'Frankelyne's Tale'
'... to visit the ferrest in his parische.' line 493, 'Prologue'
'Twenty bokes clad in blak and reed.' line 294, 'Prologue'
'And all his earnest turneth to a jape,' line 204, 'Miller's Tale'
'To yve a penny of his good.' line 277, 'Frere's Tale'.18

The substantivation of adjectives in the fourteenth century was really very little different from the present twentieth century. "We substantivize as many of our adjectives as Chaucer did. In fact, almost every adjective can be so used."19

In the writings of Chaucer are found the first stages in the cultivation of modern standard English; however,

17 Ibid., p. 251.  
19 Ibid., p. 268.
... he had not the advantage, a questionable one perhaps, of a wealth of formal expressions upon a discriminating choice of which depends in great part the refinement of modern writing. ... he had the distinct advantage of being unhampered in his movement of being free to apply his own genius to the invention of expressions. He had the inestimable advantage of writing in a language not yet worn to triteness.\textsuperscript{20}

During Chaucer's period, the inflectional endings, which had previously distinguished nouns and verbs, underwent phonological decay; this caused many of the nouns and verbs to become homonymous and set the pattern for functional shift. By 1175, the English had borrowed from the French the word crune, "crown," and given it the form i-cruned, "crowned"; probably this is the first of hundreds of noun-verb forms from the French which were shifted.\textsuperscript{21}

By 1300, ninety sets of these verbs had come into English from the French, such as blame, and to blame, doubt and to doubt, challenge and to challenge, feast and to feast, honor and to honor. "Confronted with the pattern of homonymous nouns and verbs, speakers of English readily adopted the natural procedure of freeing changing nouns to verb uses, and vice versa, without bothering with derivational processes."\textsuperscript{22}

Functional change was working at the beginning of the thirteenth century, for the Oxford English Dictionary gives such locutions as to pride, to gleam, to rust, to cripple,

\textsuperscript{20} George H. Mcknight, Modern English in the Making, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{21} Lee, op. cit., p. 2. \textsuperscript{22}Ibid.
to hook, to spur, to dust, to pen. All of these, it will be noted, are of Old English origin. Then by the middle of the century came the first uses for a fall, a chew, a look, a weep, a miss.23

The fourteenth century saw the addition of many homonymous noun-verb sets from the French, and with this addition came numerous examples of functional shift. Many changes took place throughout the century with such locutions as to sleet, to sand, to wax, to string, to outrage, to trespass, to dice, to checker, to buckle, to robe. According to the Oxford English Dictionary over two hundred and eighty nouns changing to verbs appeared during the century, an average of almost three a year.24

During the fifteenth century there was a slight falling off in the number of verbs formed from nouns of Old English origin because almost all were changed which could be changed. The sixteenth century witnessed a large number of new grammatical usages brought about by conversion. In the first half of this century about four new words were produced a year by this process; however, during the second half of this century, there was an average of eight words each year. "By the sixteenth century there was no difference at all in the treatment of words of Old English origin and those from the French; both changed with equal ease."25

23 Ibid. 24 Ibid., p. 3. 25 Ibid., p. 4.
The Elizabethans did not evolve any new methods of changing the function of words, but they used the process more freely, and Shakespeare was one of the greatest masters in this linguistic change. "The sensitiveness of Shakespeare to the quality, the habits, and the history of the words he plays with is a trained gift." 26

During the Elizabethan period many dialects were spoken, and modes of expression were varied greatly by freedom in combining words and shifting words to meet new meanings. "In Elizabethan language they [shifts] are a conspicuous feature." 27 In the simple word close, there is a bewildering variety of meanings. As an adjective or adverb, it appears as [klos] in keeping close, "enclosed," "confined"; close intent, "secret"; close villain, "secretive." But as a verb close [kloz] had even greater variety of meanings: "enclose," "join," as close hands; "grapple" as close with him"; "come to terms," He closes with you in this consequence. 28

Functional shift was practiced in the age of Shakespeare by the average Englishman as well as the superior Englishman. 29


27 McKnight, op. cit., p. 183.

28 Ibid.

In Shakespeare's language usage was the controlling force,
whereas rule was of little consideration.\textsuperscript{30}

Shakespeare's genius as a manipulator of words is
especially shown in his way of taking existing words
and giving them new turns of meaning, and investing
them with metaphorical significance.\textsuperscript{31}

McKnight theorizes that Shakespeare may have served for
a number of years as a schoolmaster as shown "in not only his
facile use of the art and artifices of rhetoric, but his keen
awareness of the Latin meanings of derivative words, his bi-
lingual puns, and his sense of the absurdity in the malaprop-
ism, or the mishandling of these 'hard words' in the speech
of the illiterate."\textsuperscript{32} Shakespeare was equally at ease with
the cultivated wits of his time and with the professional
critics, winning recognition from both circles as the fore-
most literary critic of his time.\textsuperscript{33}

Shakespeare's use of functional shift may be seen in
such locutions as to\textit{ happy}, to\textit{ barn}, to\textit{ child}, to\textit{ climate},
to\textit{ disaster}, to\textit{ furnace}, to\textit{ lesson}, to\textit{ malice}, to\textit{ property},
to\textit{ verse}. Some have been retained as to\textit{ fever} and to\textit{ fool}.\textsuperscript{34}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{30} McKnight, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 152.
\\textsuperscript{31}U. S. Mackie, "Shakespeare's English and How Far It Can
Be Investigated with the Help of the New English Dictionary,"
\\textsuperscript{32}McKnight, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 155.
\\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., p. 156.
\\textsuperscript{34}Mencken, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 384.
\end{flushright}
This quotation is a typical example of Shakespeare's functional shift: "You can happy your friend, malice or foot your enemy, or fall an axe on his neck." Other locations from Shakespeare's writings are "cudgelling one's brain," "falling to blows," "breathing a word," "breathing one's last," "bury their faces in their coats," "man's toes looking through his shoes," "sending a note," "backing a horse," "things that bagged all description," "catching a meaning," "being sick of a thing."

In speaking of a Scotch or American accent, people are using a Shakespearean shift. In his play King John, Shakespeare said,

... Pardon me,
That any accent breaking from my tongue,
Should escape the true acquaintance of mine ear.

Other peculiar uses of his unusual syntax are "we trifle time" and "I have no mind of feasting for the tonight." In the use of the word gentle, Shakespeare made it into a verb in Henry V, whereas Chaucer had his "parfit gentle knight" an adjective meaning "of good family."

He today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile
This day shall gentle his condition.

35 Margaret Bryant, Modern English and Its Heritage, p. 287.
38 Jespersen, op. cit., p. 223.
Several instances of functional shift may be found in Shakespeare's Macbeth, such as "Till he unseamed him from the nave to chaps," "my gashes cry for help," "the greatest is behind," "which the eye fears," "that I may pour my spirits in thine ear," "Might be the be-all and the end-all here," "wears upon his baby-brow the round and top of sovereignty."

Many of these expressions used by Shakespeare have dropped from the language, but many others have passed the test of time and are still in good usage today. In fact, many of the present-day locutions which were shifted by Shakespeare from one part of speech to another have become so familiar to the average speaker that he does not recognize a shift in usage.

Modern philology has destroyed the theory that a language can and should be fixed; that the first duty of a language is to have a polite usage, and that everything else should be forever impolite; that a civilized language should be commended, like a fashionable club, rather for its power to exclude new-comers than for its willingness to inspect and admit them. The Elizabethans lived before the vogue of this academic theory of language (though one can see it coming), and we, by a similar good fortune, live after its decline. It is a point of community between the Elizabethans and ourselves of which I think we are conscious and nowhere more warmly than over the language of Shakespeare.

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40 Hewey B. Ingis and others, Adventures in English Literature, p. 112.
41 Ibid., p. 119.
42 Ibid., p. 121.
43 Ibid., p. 145.
44 Gordon, op. cit., p. 259.
During the seventeenth century when the English-speaking people came to America, it was natural that, since the plants, animals, and topography were in many respects new to them, they should use familiar words in a new application. "All of which brings us back to the doctrine that usage, not etymology, determines the meaning of words." 45

Many words have taken on new meanings while still retaining the old meaning in good usage. "This tendency of words to develop additional meanings, while still employed in those from which the newer applications have come, causes us to find so many definitions under a single head in the dictionary." 46 Then in some cases a noun may be formed even though there is already one very similar derived from the same verb; "thus a move has nearly the same meaning as removal, movement, or motion (from which a later verb to motion was formed); a resolve and resolution; a laugh and laughter are nearly the same thing (though an exhibit is only one of the things found in an exhibition)." 47

The American people have a tendency to dispose of long explanatory phrases by substituting a succinct word, sometimes a compound such as the hospital series: doll-hospital,

45 Stuart Robertson, Development of Modern English, p. 437.


47 Jespersen, op. cit., p. 169.
china-hospital, camera-hospital. Even though some of these shifts are not on standard level, yet, "Nothing could exceed the brilliancy of such inventions as joy-ride, high-brow, sob-sister, frame-up, has-been. They are bold; they are vivid; they meet genuine needs." In such words as bone-head, skunk, boob, piker, four-flusher, clock-watcher, chin-music, and one-horse, the American shows "a tendency to combat the disagreeable with irony, to heap ridicule upon what he is suspicious of or doesn't understand." Along this same line of thought is the term rubber-neck, which is almost a complete treatise on American psychology; "it reveals the national habit of mind more clearly than any labored inquiry could ever reveal it. It has in it precisely the boldness and contempt for ordered forms that are so characteristically American."

Many words in everyday usage have jumped from one function to another: redcap, from the garment to the functionary; beads, from the prayers to the object handled in accompaniment to the prayers; whistle, from the instrument to the sound; entrance, from the action to the place. In a similar vein there is the use of animal names for people in such locations as calling a man an ass, a hog, a fox, an ox, a child a monkey, and a woman a mouse, a goose, or a hen.

\[48\] Mencken, op. cit., p. 201.  
\[49\] Ibid., p. 196.  
\[50\] Ibid., p. 197.  
\[51\] Ibid., p. 33.  
\[52\] R. H. Walpole, Semantics, p. 149.  
\[53\] Bloomfield, op. cit., p. 248.
A few additional examples are found in such words as capital, bluff, buck, and break. The adjective capital came to be used so frequently in the sense of capital city that it came to be associated, in spite of the other uses (capital punishment, a capital story), with the place so that its meaning of "chief city" has stood. The same is true of general for general officer, glass for glass tumbler, lyric for lyric poem; the other uses have continued side by side with the newer meanings. "The change in morphologic and syntactic value of the word is apparent: adjectives become nouns."54

In the case of bluff, the meaning was originally applied, as a nautical adjective, to the bow of a ship when nearly vertical, but by 1655, it had been extended to describe the steep bank or shore. In 1687, it appears in South Carolina as a noun, "Savannah stands on a flat bluff."55

The word buck has retained its meaning of "male deer" and has added numerous other meanings as a male Indian, a Negro, and by ellipsis buckshot. Buckskin refers to a garment worn, and to a horse the color of buckskin. Then as a further shift, it is used as a verb in this sense: "The cowpony bucked so that the rider fell off."56

54 Ibid., p. 242.
56 Ibid., p. 207.
In the west, the word break refers to a sharp interruption in the terrain; but elsewhere many meanings are found: a disturbed area on the surface of the water; a regular sale of tobacco at the breaking or opening of the hogshead; a rush or dash away from a place as a prison break; an attempt which may be unsuccessful as a breakdown; a sudden fall in the price of stocks on the stock exchange; a sudden change in the gait or speed of a horse; a mistake or error, "a bad break"; a critical or decisive point or movement. 57

In the movie industry, Mencken points out that the theater has produced some shifts which are interesting to note; for example, preview is used as both a noun and a verb; release is used as a noun, possibly from newspaper jargon; the proper noun, Oscar, becomes a common noun in reference to the Academy Award; 58 the same is true with Gertrude, a small sterling silver kangaroo, given to the author of the Pocket editions which exceed a million copies; Edgar, an award for the writer of detective stories, consists of a bust of Edgar Allan Poe; Barney, a silver cigaret box with sketches of Barney Google and Snuffy Smith, given as an award to the cartoonists of merit; Emmy, an award to the outstanding television show. 59

57 Ibid., p. 213.
This process of making common nouns from proper nouns has become very well accepted in the American language. Such forms as these are used frequently: to vulcanize, from *Vulcan*; jovial, from *Jove*; to christen, from *Christ*; panic, from *Pan*; in addition, there are those words which have not changed in form, just shifted from proper to common nouns, *amazon, atlas, bacchanalian, iris*. The name of the scientist has been shifted to the product of his handiwork in *begonia*, from the French botanist *Bégon*; *dahlia*, from the Swedish botanist *Dahl*; *macadam*, from the Scottish engineer *Macadam*; *pasteurize*, from the French scientist *Louis Pasteur*; *watt*, from the Englishman James *Watt*. A miscellaneous group may be seen in such locations as *malapropism*, from Sheridan's *Mrs. Malaprop*; *knickerbocker*, from Irving's *Knickerbocker*; *boycott*, from Captain *Boycott*; *to lynch*, from Judge *Lynch*. From proper nouns, on the other hand, verbs may develop as *to hooverize, to sanforize, to simonize*.61

The meaning of the word has frequently branched into two directions and caused the words to have variant meanings as in the case of the word *funny* meaning amusing and peculiar.62 In many cases present-day English is showing a marked tendency in the direction of functional change as

60 *Kennedy, English Usage*, p. 7.


... one might sight the gradually growing practice of 'conversion,' more particularly the use of a noun as a verb, or a verb as a noun, such as to contact and a breakdown, to illustrate the difficulties of the purist in diction who has decided that he will not approve the use of certain expressions of this kind and then finds that the great majority of his fellow speakers of English have gradually become inured to the use of such 'barbarism.' It is true that the careful user of words still feels some antipathy to the verb contact; but the business world seems to have adopted it quite generally.

Concerning the use of this same word Donald W. Lee said that in the sentence *Salesmen contact the home office regularly* the use of the word *contact* as a verb has aroused a good deal of indignation and scorn during the past fifteen years. Many teachers and purists say that it should never be accepted as good usage. "From time to time writers of textbooks and handbooks belabor this locution, along with such uses as to taxi, to price, to loan, to process, to sculpture, and a defy, a steal, an assist, a raise, a combine."

Quoting from Rupert Hughes, Mencken said that a British publisher

... instanced, among others, the verb *tiptoed* as an amazing and incredible thing. On tiptoe, or a-tiptoe, he could well understand because he had seen it in print at home. But the well-recognized truth that our language is largely made up of interchangeable facts did not calm his dismay. We know what a foot is; therefore, we can say 'she footed it gracefully,' or even speak of foottroops or footers. To toe the mark is a legitimate development from the noun toe. *Tiptoe* is a simple

65 Ibid.
employment of the franchise of our language, a franchise that Shakespeare and countless others have taken full advantage of. In fact, Richardson used it in Clarissa Harlowe as far back as 1747: 'Mabel tiptoed it to her door.' But even if he did not, why should not I?

Even though these functional shifts are evident in the language, there are some intelligent people who do not accept them, but remain provincial and prejudiced in the guise of masquerading as scientific linguists, who would blush to betray an equal intolerance in the music or furniture or social conventions of other parts of the world than their own. Doubtless the best safeguard against prejudice is knowledge, and some knowledge of the history of English in the past is necessary to be enlightened in matters affecting present use.

Therefore, it may be noted from the evidence presented from Old English, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Modern English that functional shift is a well-established practice in the English language. "In view of all of this, how shall we view such locations as to contact, to loan, a combine, an assist? We may dislike them personally, we may call them recent and not well established as yet, but we can hardly be very severe in our strictures, for certainly they are part of a long established trend in our English language."  

67 Baugh, op. cit., p. 412.
68 Lee, op. cit., p. 4.
CHAPTER III

FUNCTIONAL SHIFT IN POETIC LANGUAGE

In this study of functional shift in poetic language, a glance first will be taken at some of the shifts which occur in figures of speech. "Figurative usage may be defined . . . as the employment of words with meanings different from those properly or ordinarily assigned to them";¹ therefore, a few examples will be examined in order to see the relationship of this semantic shift to functional shift.

In reality, it may be observed that the figurative language of poetry differs from the speech of the commonplace mainly in employing fresher figures or in giving life to old locutions which are worn from constant usage. It is little short of miraculous that the limited number of sounds produced by the human voice serves to express the almost infinite variety and complexity of human thought. The achievement of this function has been possible through the changing of the powers of expression. "In this evaluation much has been accomplished by a variety of shifts in meaning, by which a single word has been made to express not one meaning alone, but a remarkable variety of meanings."²

¹Arthur G. Kennedy, Current English, p. 547.
Figurative shifts are seen in many changes in meaning which are almost paradoxical, as in the following: a university course ends with a commencement; a steamer sails; an airplane lands on the sea; weekly journals (literally "weekly dailies"—jour is French for "day") contain old news; the golf green is frequently sand; blackberries are red when they are green; things may grow smaller; some people enjoy ill health; a manuscript may be typewritten; a kerchief originally meant headcovering, but now there are handkerchief, neck-handkerchief, and pocket-handkerchief. 3

Many metaphorical shifts, in which a comparison is implied, have taken place "not in the application of a new name, but in a change in the substance or article devoted to some use while the name remains fixed." Thus it may be noted that pen persists even though the implement has changed from quill to steel. 4 The use of metaphor in the English language is a very common process because metaphors show a great range and variety in expression. "One of the devices by which language has sought to achieve greater flexibility and breadth, more accurate designations, and a finer differentiation of values, is that of comparing one thing to something else. 5 Some of the shifts which result in transferring

3 Ibid., p. 209. 4 Ibid., p. 220.
the meaning and function of words are (1) verbs derived from other words: "Smith got fired yesterday," "I've cinched the deal"; (2) nouns employed in a different sense: "He's a fathead," "She's a regular star"; (3) adjectives by derivation: "You're foxy," "Everything's in apple-pie order." Usually a poet seeks imagery in his word selection, whereas the ordinary person uses figurative locutions to put force into his speech.

In another metaphorical use, names for the parts of the body have been shifted into the inanimate world as in "bridgehead, head of a pin, head of an institution, of a class, of a coin; foot applies to part of a bed, of a grave, of a monument, of a stocking, of a table, of a page, as a unit of measure in linear measure and in poetry"; hand is used in "have a hand, on the other hand, ask for the lady's hand, hand of a clock, play a hand of cards." Also such uses as these are seen in "eye of a needle, ear and lip of a cup, teeth of a saw, fangs of a machine, goose-neck lamp"; "nose of a boat, ear of a bottle, mouth of a vessel or river, tongue of a wagon, arm of a chair or lever, bosom of the earth."  

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6Ibid., p. 272.  
7McKnight, op. cit., p. 205.  
8Ibid., p. 206.  
9Margaret Schlauch, The Gift of Tongues, p. 111.  
The shift of names in metonomy and synecdoche is between things associated by actual contiguity, either physical contact, or contact in various thought relations. Some of the locutions commonly used as metonomy and synecdoche are "all hands aboard, a fleet of fifty sails, tongue for language, head for brains, pen for writer, sword for soldier, an author's name for his works, as in 'read Shakespeare.'"\(^{11}\)

The figurative exaggeration, or hyperbole, is characteristic of much of American speech; particularly is this true of the movie industry, where all productions are spoken of as "colossal" or "stupendous." However, the speech of many other people has evidences of hyperbole in some instances such as these: fondness may become like, love, adore; a good time may be fine, lovely, delightful; pleasure may be expressed as pleased, happy, delighted, charmed, enchanted;\(^{12}\) scared to death; "I'd give the world to see him"; thanks awfully.\(^{13}\)

The contrast of hyperbole is litotes, or an understatement, which is noted in such examples as the ocean becomes a pond; a car becomes a tin lizzie. This figure was a conspicuous feature in Anglo-Saxon as is evident in Beowulf and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: "Cynewulf fought single-handed against

\(^{11}\text{McKnight, op. cit., p. 233.}\)

\(^{12}\text{Ibid., p. 279.}\)

\(^{13}\text{Greenough and Kittredge, op. cit., p. 116.}\)
many, and he was said to have fought unhemically or 'not ignobly.'"14

Euphemism is part of the figurative language and is used frequently since a Victorian feeling of squeamishness still exists in many words referring to the body and terms associated closely with the body. Formerly leg was neither mentioned nor seen; limb was preferable. Naked became nude; sweat became perspiration; sick, ill; sneeze, nose spasm.15 Profane language makes use of euphemism in such instances as "all fired (for hell fire); geewhillikins (for Jerusalem); substitution of a trivial word as God's backing; zounds (God's wounds, retaining only the genitive s); gad for God—an affected pronunciation of g."16 These locutions are not on the level of standard speech, but Arpp says that "although good modern English derives much from traditional literary English, the final test of its goodness or its badness is to be found always in immediate and not in past use."17 If the American people do not make the best use of their language, it is not because their vocabulary is inadequate, but because they are stale in the way they use it.18

14 McKnight, op. cit., p. 279.
15 Ibid., p. 269.
16 Greenough and Kittredge, op. cit., p. 304.
17 Arpp, op. cit., p. IX.
18 Hugh R. Walpole, Semantics, p. 156.
We have recognized the existence of many so-called 'figures of speech' in the common locations of everyday life. We may feel certain, therefore, that the principle is a sound one and may utilize it whenever it appears to be useful in our further study of English words. 19

From this glimpse into the semantic shifts found in figures of speech, a similarity may be noted to some instances of functional shift. However, since this study is concerned primarily with functional change, or conversion of one part of speech to another, this cursory glance at figurative usage will suffice as a preliminary study of functional shift in poetic usage.

Many individuals recognize in the language an original and a transferred meaning, and "good speakers and poets have in all times, now more, now less consciously, refreshed and intensified these transferences, or imitated them." 20 The poets have been making use of the elasticity of English grammar since the beginning of the English language; especially now that there is nothing to distinguish many nouns from verbs, and adverbs and adjectives are often the same, with a preposition shifting to an adverb with no change in appearance, it is not surprising that a "creative writer is easily led to increase the elasticity of ordinary speech when he transforms it for his higher needs." 21

19Greenough and Kittredge, op. cit., p. 18.


21Schlauch, op. cit., p. 251.
The language of the poet is full of functional shift, but it is sometimes called poetic license to use a word in an unusual sense. However, it has already been noted that Chaucer and Shakespeare used functional shift in much of their poetry. Now a glance at some of the other poets will show that the precedent set by these early masters of the poetic art has not been broken. Thomas Gray was a strict purist, but he "admitted that Shakespeare and Milton had 'enriched' the language with words of their own composition or 'invention,' but argued that the 'affectation of imitating Shakespeare may be carried too far.'"22

One of the functions of the poet is "not to oppose the forces that make for life and vividness in language, but to sift the new expressions as they arise, and ennoble, in Shakespeare's fashion, those that are worthy of it, by his usage."23 Shakespeare used an adjective as a verb when he said "Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thoughts," and the words of Tennyson are familiar to many people in "Diamond me no diamonds" and "Prize me no prizes" from the Idylls of the King.24 Even though these locations were used by such outstanding writers as Shakespeare and Tennyson, sicklied, diamond, and prize are not now used as verbs in the same sense


24 Schlauch, op. cit., p. 25.
with which these skilled writers employed them. However, there are many instances in which an early author made a shift of one part of speech to another, and continued usage by good writers has made such a location acceptable in standard English. Such an instance is seen in this line from one of Milton's sonnets: "Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow." In less and more, adjectives have been shifted to the function of nouns, but with these expressions, this shift has been done so much that one seldom thinks of them as converted nouns.

Fitz-Greene Halleck, one of the early American poets, used this same shift in his poem "Marco Bozzaris" when he said

There had the Persian thousands stood
Has won the battle for the free . . .
Bozzaris! with the storied brave. 26

A later American poet, Joaquin Miller, had the same shift in "each impatient brave shot . . . " 27 Alice Buer Miller wrote "I must weigh the ill against the good"; 28 also one may read, without any thought of the unusual, Louis Untermeyer's lines in "Caliban in the Coal Mine":

But, there's the cold and the dark

25Rewey B. Inglis and others, Adventures in English Literature, p. 203.
26Dudley Miles and Robert C. Pooley, Literature and Life in America, p. 106.
27Ibid., p. 377.  28Ibid., p. 699.
Even you'd tire of it soon
Down in the dark and the damp. 29

Then in the writings of some British poets may be seen
a similar shift in the use of an adjective for a noun as in
Browning's poem 'Up at a Villa—Down in the City' with this
line: "But bless you, it's dear—its dear! fowls, wine at
double the rate." 30 But the use of this word dear in the
sense of expensive has been so common in the language for
years that it is not thought of as a converted part of speech.
Also in Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra," he used adjectives for
substantives, and standard English employs these same locu-
tions in the same sense:

The best is yet to be
... . . . . . . . . .
A whole I planned
... . . . . . . . . .
... . . . . . . . . .
... . . . . . . . . .
if the Right
And good and Infinite
Be named here. . . . . .31

In a similar shift Browning used this line in "Epilogue to
Asolando"; "Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong
would triumph." 32 In the use of the word worsted as a verb,
the New English Dictionary states that it was first used as
a verb in 1651, and the use has continued to the present time,

29Ibid., p. 661.
30Inglis and others, op. cit., p. 420.
31Ibid., p. 431.
for frequently one hears **worsted** and also **worsen** in the function of a verb.

In Tennyson's poem "In Memoriam" the same shift of an adjective to noun may be noted in:

> Ring out the **old**, ring in the **new**.
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
> Sad as the **last** which reddens over one.\(^{38}\)

However, one is not surprised at such expressions because they are in current usage in this same function. In the use of the word **little** a common example is noted of adjective-to-noun shift in Thomas Hardy's line "But he could do **little** for them";\(^{34}\) in this line of Sara H. Hay: "And the pathetic **little** that he taught";\(^{35}\) in Wordsworth's line there is the same shift "**Little** we see in nature that is ours";\(^{36}\) also in James Stephens' line "And the poor, when they're old have **little** of peace."\(^{37}\)

Adjectives describing colors have become traditional substantives in such expressions as Hardy's "when beeches drip in **browns** and **dune**";\(^{38}\) A. E. Housman's "wearing **white** for Eastertide";\(^{39}\) George W. Russell's "It's silent **blue**


\(^{34}\) *Inglis and others, op. cit.*, p. 505.

\(^{35}\) *Miles and Pooley, Literature and Life in America*, p. 702.

\(^{36}\) *Inglis and others, op. cit.*, p. 327.


and silver hear . . . "; but Walt Whitman said "what is that dusky spot in your brown yellow?"

The same conventional use of adjective for noun which has become acceptable in standard speech may be noted in William Butler Yeats' "The Fiddler of Dooney":

For the good are always the merry,
Save by an evil chance,
And the merry love the fiddle,
And the merry love to dance.

Also, along this same line, except that the superlative form is used, examples may be noted in such shifts as Fitzgerald used in "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam" in "For some we loved, the loveliest and the best"; in Burns' line "His wisdom sees the best"; in William Watson's "If I tell thee, sweetest"; in the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe, one may see the same use of the superlative in "Where the good and the bad and the worst and the best"; also in Oliver Wendell Holmes' "One whose best was not over well." But in these functional

42 Inglis and others, *op. cit.*, p. 510.
shifts continued use by the best writers of the past century has established these forms so that they are accepted in present usage.

In the same traditional usage which has established itself so well that it is not unusual, one may note the shifting of other parts of speech for verbs. In this instance Matthew Arnold shifted an adverb to a verb "Come, dear children, let us away";\(^{48}\) however, this was not an original shift with Arnold, for the New English Dictionary gives this use of away as a verb as early as 1526, when Tindale translated in Matthew XIX, "Awaye with him, awaye with him, crucify him."

An even older usage of a noun for a verb may be seen in Fitzgerald's line "And those who husbanded the golden grain,"\(^{49}\) for the New English Dictionary notes that this was first used as a verb in 1420. Then one may observe John Masefield's use of the noun laurel as a verb in "riding triumphantly laureled to lap the fat,"\(^{50}\) but this word has been used as a verb since 1631. The same poet used an adjective for a verb in "... remember, better the world with a song";\(^{51}\) however, this usage is rather common. Another poet who made use of the noun-to-verb shift is Alfred Noyes in

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\(^{48}\)Miles and Pooley, Literature and Life in England, p. 582.

\(^{49}\)Ibid., p. 586.

\(^{50}\)Inglis and others, op. cit., p. 526.

\(^{51}\)Ibid., p. 533.
You hear the rest, without a doubt,  
all chorusing for London  
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .  
There's a barrel organ caroling  
across a golden street  
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .  
And the wheeling world remembers all. . .  

Yet these shifts had been made long before Noyes wrote his poems; chorusing was first used as a verb by Richardson in Pamela in 1748; caroling was used as a verb as early as Chaucer; and wheeling has been used as a verb from the time of Milton. In a similar shift Longfellow said "Only those who brave its dangers," but this adjective-to-verb shift was not new with him, and it is commonly used at the present time. Jesse Stuart spoke of "streams that spiral high" and "a crow wings over . . . ," but spiral was first used as a verb in 1834, according to the New English Dictionary, and wings was made into a verb by Shakespeare. The noun mirror became a verb long before Robinson Jeffers used it in "calm of an ebb that mirrors their wings," and Dubose Heyward said "You woke their mirrored glory in my eyes."

The adjective narrow was converted into a verb as early as 1000, and is still used in that function today as may be

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52 Ibid., p. 537.
53 Miles and Pooley, Literature and Life in America, p. 229.
54 Ibid., p. 681.  55 Ibid., p. 689.
56 Ibid., p. 680.
noted in Robert Nathan's line "Where the harbor narrowed thin and long." But at a later date, 1862, Thackeray first used bugle as a verb, and Richard Hovey made use of the same shift in "To bugle forth the rights of men."58

In the poetry of Walt Whitman one may see some of these long-accepted functional shifts in such lines as:

Do not be decoyed elsewhere
But edging near as privately for me. 59

The New English Dictionary notes that decoyed was first a noun and during the nineteenth century took on the functions of a verb, but edging has been used as a verb meaning to move near as early as 1600.

In regard to innovations in the American language, Mencken felt that Whitman and Lowell were leaders, for he said

Walt Whitman and James Russell Lowell were the first American men of letters to give assent to the great change taking place in American speech. In fact, Whitman prophesies: 'The Americans are going to be the most fluent and melodious-voiced people in the world--and the perfect users of words. The new world, the new times, the new people, the new vistas need a new tongue according--yes, what is more, they will have such a tongue--will not be satisfied until it is evolved.'60

In the poetry of James Russell Lowell some examples of one type of functional shift may be seen in the shifting of

57 Ibid., p. 696.
58 Ibid., p. 693. 59 Ibid., p. 296.
60 Mencken, The American Language, p. 89.
a word from the intransitive to the transitive verb. This shift may be noted in "The Courtin'":

He'd sparked it with full twenty gals,
He'd squired 'em, danced 'em, druv 'em. 61

These examples which have been noted are in common usage today, and are accepted in many cases as standard English; nevertheless, there are some instances in the language of the poets in which shifts are made that have not been accepted in standard English. These examples have not become acceptable because they have not passed the test of time and universal usage, or they may have been used just as nonce words. An example of this type of functional shift may be noted in Milton's "Il Penseroso" in this line:

... unsphere 62
The spirit of Plato. ...

In this instance Milton made a verb from the noun sphere and gave it the prefix un-. A similar shift was made by Burns in "The Cotter's Saturday Night" when he made a noun into a verb in this line: "Together hymning their Creator's praise." 63

The noun hymn has several derivative forms, but today one seldom hears this shift which Burns used.

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61 Miles and Pooley, Literature and Life in America, p. 249.

62 Inglis and others, op. cit., p. 198.

63 Miles and Pooley, Literature and Life in England, p. 269.
Many years later another British poet, A. E. Housman, used a shift which is uncommon: "who'll beyond the hills away." This use of beyond, which is usually an adverb, here as a verb is rather unusual, for the New English Dictionary does not record any instance of this word used as a verb.

Sometimes the poets have converted adjectives and nouns into verbs and verbals as one may see in these examples: Chesterton said, "Purpling all the ocean like a bloody pirate's sloop"; Rupert Brooke wrote, "... loved; gone proudly friended"; and W. S. Gilbert used this shift: "When the enterprising burglar's not a-burglaring." These three examples, purpling, friended, and a-burglaring, are used in extraordinary shifts since one seldom sees these particular forms with the functions of a verb.

In a similar shift of noun to verbal one may note in John Masefield's words "Guesting awhile in the rooms of the beautiful inn" a conversion which was used as early as 1330, but is seldom used in this sense at the present time. Another shift, which one hears infrequently, of adverbs

64 Inglis and others, op. cit., p. 506.
65 Ibid., p. 524.
66 Miles and Pooley, Literature and Life in England, p. 768.
67 Ibid., p. 596.
68 Inglis and others, op. cit., p. 526.
to nouns is seen in Walt Whitman's line "I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter." 69

Another American poet, a contemporary of Whitman, made frequent use of functional shift in his poetry; Sidney Lanier used nouns for verbs in these lines from "The Waving of the Corn":

To pleasure August, bees, fair thoughts, and me
To company with large amiable trees. 70

Also in Lanier's poem "My Springs" one may read

And mirror all of life and time . . .
And diamonds and the whole sweet round
Of littles that large life compound. 71

In these lines Lanier is not using innovations in his shifting of words in mirror and round, but in the use of littles, he made a conversion rarely seen in this word by adding an -a to the word little. In this line from "The Marshes of Glynn," he also made a rare change when he shifted this verb to a substantive in "And the sun is await at the ponderous gate in the west." 72

From these poetical examples of functional shift it may be seen that the poets, both British and American, have employed this linguistic device from the time of Chaucer and Shakespeare to the present day. "On the whole modern poets do not take

69 Miles and Poole, Literature and Life in America, p. 296.
70 Ibid., p. 370.
71 Ibid., p. 371.
72 Ibid., p. 373.
their grammar from any one old author or book, but are apt to use any deviation from the ordinary grammar they lay hold of anywhere.\textsuperscript{73}

However, it becomes evident that there are two classifications of functional shift: those words which are shifted from the original use, but have been so long in good usage that they are accepted on the literary level of English; and those which have been shifted from their original use, but have not been employed in this shifted sense enough to become accepted and must necessarily be classified on the colloquial level of English usage.

\textsuperscript{73} Otto Jespersen, \textit{The Growth and Structure of the English Language}, p. 235.
CHAPTER IV

FUNCTIONAL SHIFT IN PRESENT-DAY WRITING

In the preceding chapters of this study, a view has been taken of functional shift in the early history of the English language and in the poetic usage of the English language; now a survey will be undertaken of this linguistic process in the writings of the current period. One may note "that a living language like English is in a constant state of change, and that it is a mistake to believe, as so many people do, that the language can be preserved (or frozen) between the covers of the dictionary or the grammar book."¹

This process of functional shift, even though it has been common in the English language since the time of Beowulf, has not always been recognized by scholars of the language. Louise Pound pointed out that in 1926 some leading linguistic students were reluctantly admitting functional shift; and she noted about new words that

They may come through interchange of the parts of speech, as infinitives which become nouns, e.g., divide, cut, burn, meet, and recently sing. Sometimes these infinitives transformed into nouns are found mostly in plurals, as eats, weeps, feeds, smokes. Even an adjective may become a verb, as to wireless. Like is trying

hard to become a conjunction. One hopes it will fail.\(^2\)

As anyone reads the newspaper, a modern novel, or his favorite magazine, he may become aware of an unusual use of a word which has long been familiar to him. Such an instance may be seen in the shifting of difference, ordinarily used as a noun, to the function of a verb in this sentence: "Those qualities which difference it from Beowulf are mainly negative."\(^3\) Or one may read this announcement in the society columns:

Mr. and Mrs. W. R. Jones announce the pinning of their daughter, Alice, to Richard Brown, son of James Brown.\(^4\)

In the use of the word pinning as a substantive, one may see a new function of this word, for here it gives a name to the practice of presenting a jeweled pin of a social fraternity to a young lady.

As an outgrowth of the destruction wreaked upon Coventry, England, during World War II, the proper noun Coventry was shifted to a verb in this sentence: "They concentrated on Mannheim, to use the German expression."\(^5\)


\(^3\) Francis B. Gummere, *The Oldest English Epic*, p. 159.


\(^5\) "Vocabulary," *American Speech*, XIV (February, 1941), 25.
In a similar shift the word Clippering was used as the heading for a picture of Harry L. Hopkins as he took the Clipper for England.\textsuperscript{6} Or one may see "merry her Christmas with useful, enduring gifts"; "No one accused any of the visiting legionnaires of having souvenired the trademark"; "Tex Duke, who has been cowboying for the outfit for . . . "\textsuperscript{7}

Mencken pointed out various examples which he had gleaned of functional shift employed by present-day writers. Some of these noun-to-verb shifts are seen in these sentences: "Most of them prefer the column which Fraley by-lines daily"; "This was exampled in the program worked out . . . "; "Some hair which I permanent waved did not take the permanent"; " . . . solution of the so-called Negro problem be prioritized to the hands of white Southerners"; " . . . he had scripted over B.B.C."; "I heard a waitress speak of having waitressed for six years."\textsuperscript{8}

In the periodical \textit{American Speech} examples are given of interesting new words, many of which are new only in the shifting from one part of speech to another. The verb freeze has been shifted semantically in such instances as "with excessive costs freezing taxes on property" and "It would, by

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Miscellany}," \textit{American Speech}, XIV (April, 1941), 159.

\textsuperscript{7} Pearl L. Cosgrave, "Jottings," \textit{American Speech}, XXII (October, 1948), 306.

\textsuperscript{8} H. L. Mencken, "Verbs New and Old," \textit{American Speech}, XXI (1947), 305.
freezing the present borders, prevent . . . " But in the word premier, ordinarily used as a noun, functional shift occurs in this usage as a verb: "This composition was premiered [pri-mèrd]." Another shift is seen in the word lovely from the usual adjective to a noun in "Lucille Ball and other sleek lovelies appear." Or a shift of verb to adjective may be observed during election days in speaking of a write-in candidate, one whose name is written in by hand on the ballot. Then in the business world one frequently hears of the labor unions featherbedding jobs, or making more jobs, for union members.

Some of these shifts have been used so long that they are accepted as standard speech; for example, one often sees an instance of author becoming a verb as "authored by an experienced surgeon," or "We subwayed to Brooklyn," and "He test flew these planes"; nevertheless, there have been objections to using some shifts because they are looked upon as ambiguous wartime creations, such as the verb to implement

11Ibid., p. 285.
12"Among the New Words," American Speech, XIX (1944), 305.
and the noun breakdown,\textsuperscript{15} but these locutions are being heard more frequently as time passes.

However, a few instances may be seen in these examples from \textit{American Speech} in which a shift has been made that would be called a nonce word or expression because it is very seldom used. Examples of some of these nonce expressions are "A western barbecue, cheffed by Captain Ellison . . . "; an American Legion Post was selling chances on a refrigerator and the sign read "To be chanced off"; the noun duty becomes a verb in "... when he was dutied with the navy in . . . "; and similarly the noun post card is used as a verb in "Blackstone post cards about the flowers, sunshine, golf . . . ";\textsuperscript{16} children shifts from a noun to an adjective in "... a lady who is ... happily married, triply-childrened, public-spirited . . . "; or a noun-to-verb shift in "... the moment he becomes undecided, well-meaning and guilty, he is Hamleted out of service as a writer"; another adjective-to-verb shift is seen in "Pain throbbed in his head and the right side of his face numbed."\textsuperscript{17}

On the other hand, the current magazines, novels, and essays present numerous examples of functional shift which have become so well established in the language that they

\textsuperscript{15}J. H. Newman, "Interest in English Language Problems," \textit{American Speech}, \textit{XX} (1945), 99.

\textsuperscript{16}Pound, "Miscellany," \textit{American Speech}, \textit{XXIII} (1948), 70.

\textsuperscript{17}Prescott, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 147.
are accepted as standard English. No longer does the
strictest purist object to this usage of adjective for
noun: "The fashion of the hour was for the brilliant and
the beautiful of Hollywood"; 18 "Take much of textures"; 19
"Golf, bike rent, and riding are the only extras and . . . "; 20
". . . not the simple, but the sophisticated . . . "; 21
"Is it possible to bring the best out of people . . . tendency to display their worst"; 22 and in an editorial in Life
magazine the inscription on the Statue of Liberty was quoted
in which this same shift is evident:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free . . . 23

In his current novel, Robert Penn Warren, who is a col-
lege professor of English, employed functional shift in the
traditional use of the same adjective-to-noun shift in such
locutions as these: "Even at Lexington, where the children
of the rich could get lessons in French"; 24 " . . . when the
she-bear brings out her young"; 25 " . . . devotion of the

18 Esquire, XXXIV (November, 1950), 65.
20 Ibid., p. 12.
21 Ladies Home Journal, LVII (September, 1950), 11.
23 Life (October 16, 1950), p. 47.
faithful and the joy of the saved...", 26 "... he would treat him to the beat"; 27 "All of this was to the good"; 28 "... in the green and gristle of time." 29

Another author, using a number of the same traditional shifts, is Fulton Oursler, who is senior editor of the Readers' Digest. In his latest book, these examples of functional shift, which are on the standard level of English, may be seen: "This is my best"; 30 "There was, as I have said, no absolute whatever: no right, no wrong... the old notion of the existence of the good and evil..."; 32 "This voice of the true ethic is dangerous for the happy." 33

In the same traditionally accepted manner some other shifts may be noted of adverb to verb in "... and thus furthered the American way of life"; 34 and then an adverb to a noun in "The above are but a sampling..."; 35 in addition one may see this noun-to-verb and verb-to-noun shift: "also programmed are pack trips and evening doings"; 36 "It was the biggest seven days of programming in the...". 37

26 Ibid., p. 24. 27 Ibid., p. 35.
28 Ibid., p. 274. 29 Ibid., p. 5.
30 Fulton Oursler, Why I Know There Is a God, p. 20.
31 Ibid., p. 22. 32 Ibid., p. 24. 33 Ibid., p. 37.
34 Think, XVI (October, 1950), 3. 35 Ibid., p. 5.
36 Glamour (September, 1950), 64.
37 Newsweek, XVI (October 16, 1950), 54.
and "Programming is expensive." This shift of noun to verb is frequently used: "Coronado saw Acoma and wintered there," "Factories will mushroom far from . . . .," and "when fathering a piece like this . . . ."

Similarly one may see this verb-to-noun shift: " . . . an artificial product, the output of a Norwegian . . . ." and "who made a professional comeback." This adjective-to-verb shift is acceptable as standard English: " . . . the staff . . . is readying the December issue," and " . . . some were being readied for another amphibious . . . ."

In these same sources may be found some examples of shifts that are acceptable only on the colloquial level of speech. The first in this group is really a semantic shift: " . . . the round of California fashion showings . . . ." The words giveaway and get-up are heard rather frequently in such instances as " . . . you begin to look like the Fuller Brush man's free giveaway to . . . ." and "November has

38 Esquire, XXXIV (November, 1950), 107.
39 Think, XVI (August, 1950), 57.
40 Esquire, XXXIV (November, 1950), 36.
41 Think, XVI (August, 1950), 23.
42 Newsweek, XXXVI (October 16, 1950), 54.
44 Time, LVI (October 16, 1950), 27.
magic, too, for the man with the get-up to go places."47 Likewise, one often uses big time to refer to shows and professional ball games as in "... until the Marxes hit the big time after ..."48 One frequently hears this colloquial usage: "... he would outsmart Russian diplomats,"49 as well as these: "In Korea, the Russian officer said, the U.S.S.R. had lost not only face but great stores," "U.S. youth ... would not back out of a fight,"50 and "... young men ... had been lined up and machine-gunned."51 These noun-to-verb changes are often heard: "... Tom Dewey's dig at Russia ...,"52 "troops now beefed up from five division to six division strength ...,"53 "Red shells plastered our lines,"54 and "... manufacturers are doing a little human stockpiling ..."55

Also in colloquial usage one may hear this adverb-to-substantive shift: "... many parents are inclined to let well enough alone,"56 even though enough used alone may be a substantive, the combination with well makes an unusual

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47Ibid., p. 22.  
48Ibid., p. 34.  
49Time, LVI (October 16, 1950), 20.  
50Ibid., p. 24.  
51Ibid., p. 28.  
52Newsweek, XXXVI (October 2, 1950), 13.  
53Ibid., p. 17.  
54Ibid., p. 21.  
55Newsweek, XXXVI (October 16, 1950), 48.  
shift in this substantival usage. In sports, one frequently shifts the noun clock to a verb as in "The race . . . cannot be clocked with precision."\(^5\) In converting the noun speech to a verb by adding a suffix in " . . . writing articles . . . speechifying for relief,"\(^6\) Warren makes an unnecessary shift since the language already has a verb to speak; nevertheless, many shifts of a word from one part of speech to another merely supplement words which have long been in use. Frequently heard on the colloquial level are such noun-to-verb conversions as "We are not simply mouthing idle phrases" and " . . . an easy way of salving our consciences."\(^7\) The use of a proper noun for a verb is common in this instance: " . . . she was being shanghaied to Russia to be liquidated," but in the use of liquidated in this sense, the shift is merely semantic as in this sentence by the same writer: "Trouble came and littered on my doorstep."\(^8\)

Closely akin to the words on the colloquial level are the nonce words, or expressions used seemingly for one occasion. In this category, one may see this adjective-to-substantive shift: "It was one of his rare sabbaticals from his outpost."\(^9\) Then in these sentences, Warren has a rather

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 43.
\(^6\)Warren, op. cit., p. 151.
\(^7\)Your life (November, 1950), p. 2.
\(^8\)Oursler, op. cit., p. 46.
\(^9\)Ibid., p. 19.
rare usage: "Then his muscles tensed."

63 and "... well-horsed and equipped." In this instance one has a feeling of the unusual in ". . . the serious matador was sitting at a crowded table before a coffee and milk"; 64 even though these words are used in the sense of substantives, the article a seems to set them apart as a single unit of thought. On the other hand, a complete shift is noted in "These are never-before kitchens" 65 with the combination of never-before used as an adjective. Another unusual shift is "After hours of proing and conning, we agreed . . . ," 66 for here the adverbs pro and con assume the function of verbal nouns.

Still in the classification of nonce expressions, one may see this use of beam: "... we could beam sound through the brain," 67 but this word may soon be considered colloquial or even standard because of its use in the fields of television and radar. Also, this usage of the adjective for a verb is becoming more common: ". . . all these . . . created and popularized that common group . . . ," 68 but heard less

62 Warren, op. cit., p. 298.
63 Ibid., p. 460.
65 Ladies Home Journal, LVII (September, 1950), 116.
66 Glamour (September, 1950), p. 239.
67 Think, XVI (August, 1950), 21.
68 Life (October 16, 1950), p. 46.
frequently are "Football is pricing itself out of business" and "North Carolina's well-dressed footballers wear . . . "; 69 however, the use of pricing in this sense is a semantic shift. Other nonce expressions may be noticed in " . . . one of Stalin's aides . . . has defected to the West"; 70 and "It had been honeycombed with wartime anti-aircraft," "The Reds clobbered them," 71 and "Filibusted windup." 72 This shift of interjection to verb is very unusual: "The prince tut-tutted." 73 On the other hand, both semantic and functional shift are seen in "mothballing breakdown" 74 and "the New Jersey battleship", now being demothballed . . . 75

In the field of politics, one may see this shift which is a little unusual: "In the field of activity where the outs are forever on the hunt for some way of getting in, the ins must herd together for mutual protection." 76 Also these shifted adjectives are not seen often: "Big and old-shoe friendly . . . " and " . . . a well-bottomed drink." 77

However, the public today is becoming familiar with these terms: "Hot-rod racing, like drugstores, drive-ins,"

69 Ibid., p. 69.
70 Newsweek, XXXVI (October 2, 1950), 13.
71 Ibid., p. 20. 72 Ibid., p. 25.
73 Newsweek, XXVI (October 16, 1950), 46. 74 Ibid., p. 46.
75 Time, LVI (October 16, 1950), 19. 76 Ibid., p. 21.
77 Ibid., p. 23.
and "... lost all hope of catching up with the young hot rodders"; then in the movie industry one hears "During a two-year stint as legman for movie columnist", and a movie column heading "Up and Comers," referring to the coming attractions. Other nonce expressions may be seen in "The sense of humor sugarcoats his extremely accurate data" and "The next thing they'll be selling will be falsies--dummy television aerials for owners who are ashamed of not owning a set." Then one will note these shifts of nouns to adjectives very rarely: "I found a gloom cure" and "But reading too many scare headlines ... "

Turning to the newspaper world, one may find a rich store of functional shift in advertising, in headlines and news stories, and in sports stories. In the advertising field, in both newspapers and magazines, many neologisms are employed to attract the buying public. Advertising catalogues are another source of presenting new ideas to the prospective buyers, and, surprisingly, they wield a very potent influence, as may be noted in the following passage:

When the fact is considered that Sears' Catalogue is read by more people than any book published except the Bible--some 7,000,000 copies are dumped on the nation twice a year--it becomes apparent that the

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78 Ibid., p. 25.  
79 Ibid., p. 60.  
80 Ibid., p. 92.  
81 Esquire, XXIV (November, 1950), 34.  
82 Ibid., p. 107.  
The catalogue exerts a powerful force upon the minds of the people. It is read under conditions conducive to impressing words upon the minds, that is, when one is pondering, comparing, and wishing. Also it is impressive because the person who orders from these catalogues uses the words, even though the next year's catalogue may supplant this crop with new words.\textsuperscript{84}

In the advertising sphere, one of the most commonly noticed shifts is in the names of the colors used to describe the article advertised. Some of these terms which describe colors are semantic shifts, but a large number of the color words are nouns shifted to adjectives. In his study of the Sears' Catalogue, Bess gives some interesting findings in the category of colors: "Bamboo Beige, Oatmeal Beige, Cadet Blue, Hyacinth Blue, Hydrangea Blue, Larkspur Blue, Nautical Blue, Ocean Blue, Steel Blue, Cactus Green, Moss Green, Orchid Rose, Smokey Rose, Toffee Tan, Frosty White, Sugar White, Butter Yellow."\textsuperscript{85}

However, the catalogues are not alone in their innovations of colors, for the fashion magazines and newspapers are doing the same thing. These colors may be noted in the fashion magazines: shrimp, gold, olive, heather, burnished calf, sand, leaf green, scream-red, mink-brown, charcoal grey, laurel green, copper-penny rust, rendez-vous red, Florida orange, claret wine, wood grey.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{84}Charles E. Bess, "Glamour Words," \textit{American Speech}, XIV (1941), 99.

\textsuperscript{85}Ibid., p. 97.

\textsuperscript{86}Glamour (September, 1950), pp. 13, 23, 26, 27, 75.
In the pages of the daily newspaper, one may see the same shift of noun to adjective in reference to colors: dusky blue, jungle green, midnight grey, beige bark, myrtle green, town navy. These color words for dresses, suggesting a means of combating the summer heat, are found in a newspaper in August: iced purple, martini, sauterne, claret, champagne, pineapple punch, spring lake blue. Even in naming the fabrics from which dresses are made, advertisers use innovations resulting from shifts in such terms as these: enchantress dress crepe, tissue mellow crepe, and parade cloth.

The hosiery advertisers have also employed unusual terms such as micro film (sheer mesh) or a description such as "hose . . . with a delicious flavor . . . sanka brown . . . with a liquid kind of beauty . . . dimension-knit to fit the foot . . . ." Then one may wonder what shade of hose he would receive in these colors: beautifilm, carefree, desirable, suntone, dawnmist, lively, blush, or if, perchance,
the hose would match a pair of shoes described as kitten-soft tisseshoes. Undoubtedly these neologisms for color words must be classified as nonce expressions, for with each changing season a new group of words will arise.

Other nonce words used in advertising may be found in such locations as "Summer coolers for the small set," it is necessary to read on in order to discover that coolers are sun suits. Or one may be a little puzzled over this statement: "Now you can instantly reposition even the most awkward-looking ears," in which the noun position is given a prefix re- and shifted to a verb. Then a suit "with vested interest" is puzzling until one reads on and discovers that it is a suit with a vest. Other strange shifts may be seen in such advertisements as "reversibles (two-sided coats), two-sided story of turnabouts"; "Jeanne Barrie collars the news for fall . . . in these coats that cuddle close under your chin"; the same shift is seen here: "collared anduffed in rib knit." If the dresses which are advertised are two-piece dresses, they become "two-pieceers," "velveteen

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95 Ibid., p. 3.
96 Mademoiselle (November, 1950), p. 60.
97 Glamour (September, 1950), p. 95.
98 Ibid., p. 156.
99 Ibid., p. 118.
100 Ibid., p. 38.
101 Ibid., p. 81.
pair-off, "co-ordinates," or "grey chiffon separates"; then the dresses may be so essential that they are described as "back-to-fall musts or go-everywhere wonders," or a "day-to-dinner dress," made of "rayon bengaline in come-hither pastels." The dress one sees advertised may have a "butter-smooth fit," or it may be "a slim-hipped, sleek-lined beauty that fits to perfection, accessorizes beautifully"; this same dress may be described as "America's favorite suitcase dress... wrinkles hang right out." Thus one sees an assortment of shifts which are used freely to tempt the public into purchasing those articles made attractive by eye-catching words.

If one is interested in advertisements about homes and furnishings, he may find functional shift present in these nonce words: "Don't paint your house—you can asbestos side your home almost as cheaply" and then install an air conditioner which "cools, dehumidifies, circulates..."
and a "food bank--deepfreezer"; this word deepfreezer is rapidly becoming accepted as a standard word.

Some colloquialisms found in current advertising may be seen in such expressions as "Play it safe--get our brake reline special," and for the new automobiles there are "power glide" and "built-in brown." Other well-known products are advertised as "Guard against throat-scratch" and "Nobody is going to obsolete 100 million dollars worth of television entertainment." Two shifts which are becoming acceptable, at least in colloquial English, are "... how microfilming affords protection" and "where you'll swim, sail, aquaplane and brush up..." The word filming is used in the movie industry as a verb; so it is reasonable to shift microfilming also; and aquaplane, like motor, bike, sail, and other such words, should soon be accepted as both a noun and a verb in good usage.

However, not all advertising deals in nonce words and colloquialisms because many of the functional shifts noted

116 Ibid., p. 85.
117 Ibid. (September 9, 1950), p. 84.
119 Newsweek, XIXI (October 16, 1950), 43.
120 Glamour (September, 1950), p. 12.
in advertisements are acceptable as standard English. When one reads that something is acclaimed "the best buy of the year," 121 or "virtually a must in every man's wardrobe" 122 in order to "be a standout," 123 he is seeing a very common shift of verbs to nouns. Also, one is no longer amazed to hear even in standard English "surprise yourself and gift your friends," 124 "a young vision, gowned by . . . " 125 and "accessory note was highlighted again . . .," 126 for these nouns are shifted frequently to the function of verbs.

But on the other hand, it is not in the advertising department alone that interesting linguistic shifts occur, for one is continually cognizant of the unusual locations employed by the newspapers in headlines and news stories. The difficulties of the headline writer must be recognized; he has two inches of space in which to fit together words that will give a hint of the story to the readers, attract the reader's attention, and at the same time fit perfectly into the allotted space. "Every intelligent person . . . realizes the need for maximum economy of space in headlines,

121 Ladies Home Journal, LVII (September, 1950), 7.
122 Esquire, XXXIV (November, 1950), 38.
123 Ibid., p. 29.
124 Glamour (September, 1950), p. 11.
125 Newsweek, XXVI (October 16, 1950), 45.
126 Glamour (September, 1950), p. 12.
and accordingly views with indulgence the resulting ellipsis, transposition, violations of syntax, and even ambiguity. 127

There are two sources of trouble with the newspaper writing, according to Kennedy: first, the haste with which a newspaper is made up and printed; second, the youth and inexperience and often the sheer incompetence of reporters. "The greatest threat of newspaper English on good usage lies in 'Headline English' with its accompanying mechanical restrictions, and condensed style; for example, in 'Market Turn Held Break in Fear Complex' only the word in is actually simple. Market and fear are usually nouns or verbs, but here are adjectives. Turn and break are historically verbs, but here nouns. Held is usually a verb, but here a particle; complex is an adjective generally, but here it is a noun." 128

But whatever may be said about headlines in the newspapers, this fact is evident: a headline writer must show a certain amount of ingenuity in his selection of words. The ability to place the expressive term in the allotted space proves to be a mental exercise frequently. This example may be noted in the instance of a headline writer who had to compose a three-deck inverted pyramid headline about a charge being made to see the Stone of Scone. His first effort,


128 A. G. Kennedy, Current English, pp. 43-44.
Charge To See
Stone Angers
Scots,

was rejected because the second line was too long. His revision met the requirements for spacing,

Charge To See
Stone Ires
Scots,

but he had to shift the noun *ire* to a verb, for every good headline must have a verb. 129

The headline in the newspaper is American in origin because the British papers, even today, seldom use the same type of headline which the American newspaper employs. Mencken stated that "Charles A. Dana of the New York *Sun* . . . produced the first newspaper on earth that was decently written . . . and Hearst and Pulitzer brought in the fire-alarm headline writers." 130 Because of the fact that headlines hold a peculiar position in relation to their nature, one can see why "headline idiom breaks through all the functional fences which school books put up around parts of speech." 131

Probably the best way to understand and accept the functional shift which is employed in headline writing and news


131 Frederick Bodmer, *The Loom of Language*, p. 118.
writing is to examine some examples found in the daily
newspapers. In this first group of examples, anyone may
recognize functional shifts which have become acceptable
as traditional usages in standard English. In these in-
stances a noun has been shifted to a verb, but the verbal
function has been in use so long that dictionaries list
each of these as both nouns and verbs: "Three knifed in
argument at football game,"132 "Waltari peoples his pages
with predestined characters,"133 and "Town jails three
pickets in phone strike."134

Also these noun-to-verb shifts one has come to accept
in standard English: "... Miss Stinetoff has authored
a couple of juveniles";135 "Churchill says Europe periled";136
and "... which was fathered by some of Hollywood's best
songwriters."137 Then these adjectives are shifted to
verbs: "Government moving to ready public for total mobili-
zation";138 "Vandals dirty fresh varnish";139 "... ideas

133 Fort Worth Star-Telegram, November 18, 1950, Part II,
p. 11.
135 Ibid., Part III, August 12, 1950, p. 2.
137 Fort Worth Star-Telegram, November 14, 1950, p. 6.
138 Ibid., October 18, 1950, p. 9.
that do not square with its own”;\textsuperscript{140} and "Phone strike idles 300,000."\textsuperscript{141} This shift in the word handicap, to the one who performs the act, is noted twice in one issue of the paper: "S.M.U. dismayed the handicappers," and "Handicapper gets pardon."\textsuperscript{142}

A few examples of functional shift, in headlines and news stories, may be observed which are still on the colloquial level of speech. In these instances one may see the noun shifting to the verb: "Cadets from six foreign nations to headquarter here,"\textsuperscript{143} "New Red assaults hammer U.S. front,"\textsuperscript{144} "Bon voyage party calendared for . . . ,"\textsuperscript{145} "... a revival of revitalizing in this country,"\textsuperscript{146} "... without seeking to point a moral or to propagandize."\textsuperscript{147} But in this sentence a verb is shifted to an adjective; "Wrong suspect case righted,"\textsuperscript{148} and the adjective right shifts to a verb; however, this second shift is acceptable

\textsuperscript{140}Ibid., August 22, 1950, Part I, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{141}Ibid., November 10, 1950, Part I, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{142}Ibid., November 8, 1950, Part III, pp. 1,2.
\textsuperscript{143}Arlington Citizen, August 11, 1950, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{145}Ibid., June 24, 1950, Part II, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{146}Ibid., November 13, 1950, Part III, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{147}Fort Worth Star-Telegram, November 14, 1950, p. 2.
in standard English. Another colloquialism is found in this shifting of a verb to a noun: "Horizontal hop made."  

Some of the most interesting and perhaps startling shifts are found in the nonce expressions used in headlines and news stories. This caption was under a picture of some band members: "Morning in to highlight the summer band and choral clinic." Again, one had to read the story to know that pole cats were referred to in this headline: "Wee stinkers invade office ..." Even though the combination of an adverb plus a noun shifting to a verb is unusual, there is no doubt about the meaning in "Danny Kaye is determined to out-party any party ever given in Hollywood." Also this shift of noun to verb leaves no doubt about meaning: "Six-year-old fisherman boats sailfish and tarpon at Gulf." Although camp has been used as both noun and verb through the last century, this combination is unusual: "Her two children are summer camping in Canada." But in this shifting of the noun cellophane to a verb, the usage is unique: "In an unsentimental age which

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151 Ibid., p. 1.
153 Fort Worth Star-Telegram, August 13, 1950, p. 10.
154 Ibid., August 7, 1950, p. 15.
scorns the higher virtues unless they are cellophane in
a soap opera or a popular ballad . . . 

The only shift in this next word is semantic, but
when it appears in one-inch headlines on the front page
of the newspaper, it causes one to take a second glance:
"Offensive of Reds braked . . . "; however, this is
a real shift from noun to verb: "Delta shuttles blood
to Korea." 

The shift of concert to a verbal is a nonce expression
found in this sentence in a news story: "Years of concert-
tizing, as Miss McDonald phrased it . . . 
A similar
shift is seen in this sentence from an editorial: "In the
process of Sovietizing the satellite countries . . . 

In a feature story about an oil field worker who
attained great success, Eric Schroeder, a former professor
of journalism, uses several examples of functional shift.
Some of these are nonce expressions, and some are more
correctly classified as figurative usage and colloquialisms:

156 Ibid., p. 1.
158 Fort Worth Star-Telegram, November 1, 1950, p. 1.
159 Ibid., November 12, 1950, Part V, p. 4.
... some portion of the same ironized blood as the doughty frontiersman's could conceivably trickle into the slender San Antonio oilman through two generations of family. ... certainly much of the spunk that snarled defiance at Santa Anna oozed out in Fred ... His acquisitions and business acumen have lifted him with a sort of hydraulic jack propulsion from minus zero to plus a lot more.160

These examples of functional shift in headlines and news stories show that the reading public is continually confronted with linguistic changes, and the effect may be rather far reaching, as Mencken pointed out: "$'The headline,' said the late E. P. Mitchell, for many years editor of the New York Sun, 'is more influential than a hundred chairs of rhetoric in the shaping of future English speech.'"161

The final division of the newspaper to be considered here is the sport section, which has also received much criticism, as Kennedy stated: "$'Critics have been commenting most often upon the very much exaggerated and sometimes almost incomprehensible 'journalistic jargon' affected by sports writers and others ...'"162 But whatever may be one's reaction to the comments about the choice of verbs employed on the sports pages, this fact becomes evident: the sports writers of today are using various functional shifts to report the sporting events to a wide circle of

161Mencken, The American Language, p. 185.
162Kennedy, op. cit., p. 42.
readers. Many of these readers are the easily-influenced adolescents who will become the best speakers and writers of the language tomorrow. But an examination of some of the writings found on the sports pages of the daily newspapers will be the best means of viewing the situation. The first examples to be examined are those functional changes which have long been accepted in the English language. The word edge has been in use for many years as a verb meaning to sharpen, to trim, or to move near; however, it is with this last meaning that the verb edge is used in sports stories, as in these examples: "Notre Dame edges Tar Heels, 14 to 7,"163 "Sunset's B team edged Richardson," "Oilers edge Cats."164 The noun top was also shifted to a verb a long time ago, and is acceptable in sports stories meaning to surmount as in these instances: "Irving--Owl fracas tops 12-A schedule,"165 "Tag match tops Tuesday mat card,"166 and "Rogers-Kowalski go tops mat card,"167 however, the shift of go from a verb to a noun is unusual.

Another word commonly shifted from its original use, and accepted because of its long usage, is the verb win used as a noun in "Four-hit win over Brownies."

168 "Redskins in good shape after win," and in this instance win is used as an adjective: "Win-hungry Aggies swamp Tech." Both down and better have been used as verbs so long that the shift is well accepted as in these instances: "Dodgers down Cubs twice." and "Evelyn Kawamoto unofficially bettered her own record."

Many colloquialisms are used in sports stories, and, no doubt, they may someday be acceptable since the sports columns are rather widely read. A few examples may be noted in the shifting of such words as blank to a verb, nod to a noun, deadlock to a verb, as in these instances: "Kentucky blanks North Texas, 25 to 0," "Texas gets 28 to 14 nod over Raiders," and "East Texas deadlocks Louisiana Tech." Also, in the shifting of the noun sheet

168 Ibid., p. 6. 169 Ibid., p. 7.


173 Ibid., September 17, 1950, Part II, p. 3.


175 Ibid., October 1, 1950, Part II, p. 3.
to a verb may be seen an unusual instance. The word skeet is a revival of an obsolete form which probably came from the Scandinavian word as a variant of shoot. In this example the word is used as an adjective and as a verb: "The greatest professional skeet shot of all time . . . will be skeeting to add . . . " The word steal is listed as a verb in the dictionaries, but every one familiar with baseball terminology recognizes the use of steal as a noun in such an instance as: "Brooklyn's twin steal beats Cubs."

Also classified as colloquialisms on the sports pages are the many words which are shifted semantically, for one reads, day after day, the various synonyms employed by sports writers for the word defeat. After a weekend of football, one may read in the daily paper the results of the contests, with these verbs in the headlines: rip, rap, nip, trounce, shade, trip, outlast, thump, humble, blast, ramble, squeeze past, crush, subdue, drub, clip.

Then frequently one notices the use of alliteration in the sports headlines; many of these are words shifted from their ordinary use, such as "pass-happy Ronies," "A. C. C."

178 Ibid., October 1, 1950, Part II, p. 6.

The sports writers, as well as the advertisers and headline writers, make frequent use of nonce expressions in their sports stories and sports headlines. Some of the interesting ones may be noted here: " . . . as the Colts steam-rollered to a 19 to 6 bi-district triumph,"183 "Townsend powers way to T. C. U. one-yard line,"185 and "Arlington countered again . . . Charles Marshall bulled his way . . . on a series of crushing bucks . . . who legged it to the two,"186 "Arlington's point-a-minute plus Colts . . . the Bill Sheffield coached eleven scored . . . "187

179 Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 24, 1950, Part II, p. 3.
183 Ibid., p. 3.
184 Fort Worth Star-Telegram, November 24, 1950, p. 17.
186 Fort Worth Star-Telegram, November 18, 1950, p. 10.
Other nonce expressions are seen in these sports headlines which probably would not fit any other situation: "Cowboys rope Arizona State"\textsuperscript{188} and "West Texas belts New Mexico."\textsuperscript{189}

The shifting of \textit{up} to the function of a verb is seen in "A victory for . . . will \textit{up} their chances . . . "\textsuperscript{190} and "Cats clip Tribe, \textit{up} lead half game."\textsuperscript{191} Then the nouns \textit{option}, \textit{sideline}, and \textit{captain} are shifted to verbs in "Bucs \textit{option} Turner to New Orleans,"\textsuperscript{192} "Hedrick \textit{captains} team to victory,"\textsuperscript{193} and "Illness \textit{sidelines} Jimmy Adair."\textsuperscript{194} However, in use of \textit{repeat} as a noun, the opposite shift from verb to noun occurs: "Coe seeks amateur golf title \textit{repeat}."\textsuperscript{195}

This interesting nonce expression was noted in the \textit{American Speech}: the sportcaster used the shift, both semantic and functional, \textit{sin bin} to refer to the penalty box in an ice hockey game.\textsuperscript{196}

\textsuperscript{188} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 8.  \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{189} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{190} \textit{Ibid.}, November 3, 1950, Part I, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{191} \textit{Fort Worth Star-Telegram}, August 21, 1950, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Arlington Citizen}, July 21, 1950, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{194} \textit{Dallas Morning News}, July 3, 1950, Part II, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{195} \textit{Ibid.}, August 21, 1950, Part I, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{196} Russell, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 147.
Many of these nonce expressions are new and strange to the average reader of today, but the question presents itself: Will they be strange to the reading public twenty years from now? A glance back twenty-one years gives the idea that the same kind of changes may continue to take place so that the reader of tomorrow may be just as familiar with these nonce expressions as the present-day reader is with these pointed out in 1929:

The language is often called upon to stand a considerable strain, but it seldom is asked to withstand such a trial as in the following article from The New York Times, October 13, 1929: "Yale . . . fell before the University of Georgia; Fordham surprised by triumphing over . . . ; Notre Dame conquered Navy . . . ; Ohio State edged out Iowa; Columbia overwhelmed Wesleyan; Army turned back Davidson; Northwestern blanked Wisconsin; Richmond repulsed Johns Hopkins; Lafayette shut out Manhattan College."

Then one may see from the numerous examples given that the English language is in the process of changing, and the current writers are alive to all innovations which will help make their thoughts more meaningful. Many of the examples of functional shift examined here have become accepted into standard English because they have met the requirements of continued usage; some are colloquialisms now, but may be accepted in the future; but many are nonce expressions, which may continue to be used or may be used once or twice and then cast aside.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The fact that the English language is not a static, but an everchanging language becomes evident to the person who makes a study of functional shift. No longer does the study of formal grammar consist of memorizing many case forms of the noun and the adjective, and many complicated conjugations of the verb. Even though these forms have been dropped long ago, the present-day language is just as meaningful and colorful as it was in Early English. Parts of speech are no longer recognizable altogether by their appearance, for one may see that with such a word as down these uses are apparent: as a verb, Arlington downed Mount Vernon; as a preposition, he walked down the street; as an adverb, he looked down; as a noun, the team made six first downs. Therefore, it is only reasonable to conclude that since a word is not classified as a part of speech until it is used in a sentence, and many words have no distinguishing marks to set them apart as a definite part of speech, words may be shifted from one part of speech to another as the need arises; for functional shift is important in the fluidity of the English language. To the many purists who wish to keep the language the same

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formal type that it was during the eighteenth century, the assurance may be given that the changes resulting from functional shift will not endanger the clarity of the language, but will tend to give the language greater power.

The purpose of this study, as stated in Chapter I, has been to investigate the shifting of a word from one part of speech to another, and to determine whether this linguistic process existed in Old English and Middle English, and to note the extent that functional shift is used by present-day writers. Another purpose of this study has been to determine whether the American people are slavishly adhering to formal English usage, or are accepting neologisms in the language.

These findings are apparent in relation to Old English: functional shift was employed by these early English writers, for even in Beowulf some examples were pointed out; also some instances of the shifts of nouns, adjectives, and strong verbs to weak verbs in Old English were noted.

In the Middle English used by Chaucer functional shift was also evident. In fact, Chaucer used this linguistic change freely, as was noted in various examples from the Canterbury Tales.

About two centuries after Chaucer, Shakespeare became a master in the use of functional shift. Many of his shifts have become so well accepted that they have long been considered standard English; however, Shakespeare also used
some nonce expressions which are no longer in use. It is well recognized that he was a daring innovator in language.

An examination of the poetic language from Shakespeare's time to the present proved that poets, too, through all of the ages have been proficient in the use of functional shift. Some of their shifts have become a part of standard English, whereas many of the poetic shifts were found to be only nonce expressions.

A study of the writings of the present day has given evidence of the prevalence of functional shift in many types of writing: fiction, essay, magazine, and newspaper. Specifically, it was pointed out in a modern novel and an essay that many examples of functional shift were used, but almost all of these shifts noted have long been accepted in standard English, and just a few nonce expressions were used. Then in the examination of various types of magazines these conclusions have been reached: first, in this heterogeneous grouping, Ladies' Home Journal, Saturday Evening Post, McCall's, Think, and Your Life, a few examples of functional shift were found, but the process was not freely employed; second, in this group of fashion magazines, Mademoiselle, Glamour, and Esquire, many examples of functional shift were found, particularly those not yet accepted in standard usage; third, in the news magazines, Newsweek, Time, and Life,
there were numerous examples of functional shift, both standard words and substandard coinages.

By far the greatest amount of functional shift was found in the newspapers, especially in news stories, headlines, advertising, and sports stories. In general, the ordinary news story uses functional shift only occasionally, whereas the headline writers employ functional shift frequently to catch the eye of the reader, and to fit a word into the space allotted for headlines. This latter purpose sometimes causes the journalist to use unusual shifts in order to fit the appropriate words into the correct spacing, for one can see the economy of saying "Miss Anne Jones debuts before a large assembly" rather than "Miss Anne Jones makes her debut before a large assembly."

In the field of advertising, functional shift is used extensively for the purpose of attracting readers and consumers by the use of neologisms. The sports writers also use functional shift more freely than any other group of journalists. In sports writing it was likewise noted that some functional shifts which twenty years ago seemed to startle the reader are now accepted as almost standard English. Since one test of the standard level of speech is the continued usage of words, it is reasonable to believe that many nonce expressions used on today's sports pages will be acceptable
in the future. For, one may note, such a word as *quarterback* is not ordinarily used as a verb, but, if a sentence such as *Glasgow quarterbacked the Colts to their twenty-fifth victory* is noted on sports pages, anyone conversant with football will understand the meaning. Therefore, one has only to read the sports pages, day after day, to realize that functional shift is at work today, and will probably play a great part in the trends of the language tomorrow, for each instance of functional shift may be explained by the peculiar circumstances surrounding its use.

The next point to be noted is that man, throughout the history of the English language, has shifted words both semantically and functionally to suit his needs, without feeling greatly the restrictions of the parts of speech. The freedom which the English-speaking people have enjoyed through the years has had a tendency to create within them the feeling of individualism. It is not surprising then that both the British and the Americans have not had a sense of rigid observance of linguistic rules, for "Slavish adherence to any rule of grammar, diction, or rhetoric is the mark of an unimaginative and undiscriminating mind."

Generally, one may say that language reflects life. Change on the part of the living language reflects the period

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one lives in, and may be slow or, as in wartime, sudden.
The following observation gives the impression that man
becomes the master of his language: "Our thoughts jump,
as it were, and our words jump with them, to land sometimes
in the queerest places. In that fact we have the secret of
meaning . . . ; the secret of the romance that lies in every
word we read or speak." 2

Then, too, one may realize that the language used by
an individual may set that person apart, or it may make him
an ordinary person, for good taste and good speech both are
unobtrusive. But the language becomes alive as it is used
by the individual, for it does not live in the dictionaries,
but only in the mind of man.

The following fact, then, points to the conclusion that
man is the master of his language and sets the pattern of
usage, since

The truth is that in the end, even in the study
of the word, one is driven back to consider the charac-
ter of the writer, his sincerity, his originality, his
profundity, his sympathy, in short, the man himself.
Words must always be echoes, and beyond the words, one
must perceive their source and inspiration. A writer,
therefore, necessarily chooses his words when he estab-
ishes his habits of thought and of feeling. His words
are the garments which betray what life he has led.
They are dynamic when his character is dynamic. 3

3Krapp, The Knowledge of English, p. 469.
The study of any phase of linguistics has a tendency to broaden one's intellect and to increase his tolerance toward his fellow man, for one becomes more patient with those things that he understands. When anyone hears an uneducated person use hit for it, he should consider, first, that hit was the correct form in Old English when stress was given to all h's, before he condemns that person for using an obsolete form in his language. The same may be true in functional shift, for in such words as better and best, one learned in his early study of grammar that these were the comparative and superlative forms for the adjective good. But for many years the most acceptable writers have been using better and best as verbs; therefore, it is reasonable to assume that many other locutions shifted from their original part of speech also may be accepted in the future, for at what point may a line be drawn so that one word may be shifted but another may not?

The final conclusion which may be pointed out here is that a person may object to some of the shifts noted in this study, and may call them not well established, but functional shift is a part of a long established trend in the English language; therefore, one should agree with Curme, who said, "we ought to try to understand English before we criticize it."4

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