THE INFLUENCE OF SHAKESPEARE ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract:

The English literary world owes its greatness to William Shakespeare, the literary genius who revolutionized the English literature beyond measure. His contribution to literature and English vocabulary is immense and profound. This research paper throws a light on how William Shakespeare tuned the English language through his works. He constructed his prose and poetry and increased the standards of grammar by inventing new words. Shakespeare's diction influenced the English language evidently. He expanded the lexicon of English Language. Shakespeare is prominent with his similes and vivid imagery. He used brawny words to give images. In addition, his similes gave the complete description of the scenario. This paper presents in brief the immense contribution of Shakespeare which is invaluable even in this 21st century.

Keywords: English, Influence, Language, Expand, Unique style.

William Shakespeare, the literary genius, was born in Stratford-upon-Avon on April 23, 1564, and passed away on April 23, 1616. England honored him by declaring him as a National Poet and considered him as one of the greatest playwrights of all time. Although Shakespeare never had a degree nor went to a college, he left an indelible impression on the English literary arena for the rest of the world to emulate him. There is no denying that he is the most widely read and widely quoted writer of English language. Among the English literature, Shakespeare became one of the most influential writers in English literature because of his diction, sonnets and dramas.

His literary masterpieces include *Hamlet, Twelfth Night, Macbeth* and *King Lear among many others.* His dramas were performed more than any other dramatist's works. Shakespeare's diction influenced the English language evidently; he constructed his prose and poetry and increased the standards of grammar by inventing new words. Shakespeare was among the first writers to provide a new form to the art of writing. He has a unique style in writing plays and poetry. He created a legacy of his own in the usage of words. He was a master in using metaphors in his writing.

The following text taken from **Romeo and Juliet** (Act 3, Scene 4) is one of the examples of his writing styles:

> "Look, love, what envious streaks
> Do lace the severing clouds in yonder East:
> Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
> Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops."

Shakespeare played a vital role in standardizing the grammar. He revived the use of suffix in English grammar, which was scarcely used in his time. Furthermore, the rules which his writings depicted are followed later in English literature. Many changed the spellings of Shakespeare but not his grammar till date. Dr Jonathan Hope, a Shakespearean critic said:

> "He wrote during a transitional period for English grammar when there was a range of grammatical options open to writers. Much of the grammar he chose now seems old-fashioned but it lends poetry to commonplace words and, significantly, while his

spelling   is often updated, his grammar is not."

Shakespeare expanded the lexicon of English Language. Moreover, he forged 1700 words by adding suffix and prefixes which we are using today and transforming nouns into verbs and verbs into adjectives. He redefined and constructed a new shape to the English language. He played a crucial role in modernizing English with a new set of phrases that are quoted to date. He derived 135 new phrases in English which are still in use. One of these is recognizable:

'What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.'

Contributions like these made him a very popular and influential literary figure in the English language. Shakespeare's sonnets have a greater influence than his dictions, as he eloquently used iambic pentameters, rhymes and similes. The usage of iambic pentameters made his sonnets very captivating, and he was among the first English writers to use this technique. One Iambic pentameter looks like:

> "Shall I / com PARE/ thee TO / a SUM / mer's DAY?
> Thou ART / more LOVE/ly AND / more TEM / per ATE."

Furthermore, many poets were influenced by him, John Keats being one of them. It is said that Keats used to have Shakespeare's work on his side whenever he wrote.He said that it helped him ignite and magnify his creativity and also copied his style in his writing. He sculptured the sonnet masterly with his rhyme. His sonnets were quite rhythmic, and he wrote ten-syllable lines in his sonnets which made them more rhythmic, like these lines from *Henry V* clearly depict*:

> "Rush on his host, as doth the melted snow
> Upon the valleys, whose low vassal seat
> The Alps doth spit and void his rheum upon."
> Shakespeare is prominent with his similes and vivid imagery. He used brawny words

to give images. In addition, his similes gave the complete description of the scenario.

Though his sonnets were adored by many poets, his plays created a huge impact on the world of English literature. Shakespearean dramas influenced the English literature, as he used blank verse technique. Usage of the blank verse technique was Shakespeare's best method in his dramas and this style was followed in many of his dramas. The following is a blank verse example taken from *Hamlet*:

> "But, woe is me, you are so sick of late,
> So far from cheer and from your former state,
> That I distrust you. Yet, though I distrust,
> The discomfort you, my lord, it nothing must."

Moreover, his blank verse technique is very poetic, and had left a mark on many other contemporary writers like Christopher Marlow. The soliloquies in his dramas also created an impact on writers. His famous *Hamlet* consists of seven soliloquies, which made the play very unique in its own way. "To be or not be" is the famous soliloquy in the *Hamlet*, in which he questions the meaning of life:

> "To be, or not to be …
> …Be all my sins remembered."

This technique was followed by many other writers to create an inner conflict of character. Shakespeare followed the great ancient writers in his tragedies which was first of its kind by any English Poet. Moreover, he followed ancient Greek style, and later many writers were influenced by him to follow Aristotle and Homer. He not only influenced the English

language but the world by his tragedy *Romeo and Juliet.* He became one of the most profound writers of English language.

> "My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
>
> My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
>
> The more I have, for both are infinite."

Apart from these literary aspects, he invented many new words. According to the sources available, he invented almost 1700 new words at heterogeneous levels (Reference please…). Here are a few words invented by him.

Buzzer

Buzzer is a special word in English coined by Shakespeare. It is a word that conjures up the thoughts of disgusting game shows. But it was used in a casual conversation, in *Hamlet*.

Unreal

It may seem 'unreal', but Shakespeare also came up with the word that we now use to mean 'cool' or, in some cases, 'unbelievable'. However, in his day, 'unreal' simply meant 'not real'. In fact, he was a long-time fan of a good un- prefix coming up with plenty of words, even adding it (although not for the first time) to one of the words we now best associate with the Zuck, 'unfriend'.

Phrases Shakespeare Invented

Here are some phrases that Shakespeare is said to have invented, many of which are commonly used today.

- "It's Greek to me" (*Julius Caesar*). When you say, "It's Greek to me", you realise that nothing is understood.
- "Fair play" (*The Tempest*) – Looking at the games fairly i.e. showing an exact notice.
- "All that glitters isn't gold" (*Merchant of Venice*) - We usually use this phrase after we discover the fact that something that looks good turns out to be not that great.
- "Break the ice" (*The Taming of the Shrew*) – Asking polite questions when you meet someone.
- "Clothes make the man" (*Hamlet*) - Although not always true, this phrase implies that how a person dresses tells you something about who they are as a person.
- "Too much of a good thing" (*As You Like It*) - It is said that "too much of a good thing" (i.e. money, love, food) is not necessarily good for you.
- "In a pickle" (*The Tempest*) - To be "in a pickle" is to be in trouble from which you can not come easily.

In conclusion, Shakespeare's dictions, sonnets and dramas build him as one of the most profound impact creating writers of all time. Without Shakespeare, our English would not have been modernized as it would be a void in our life if we don't have everyday phrases like "a sorry sight" or "as pure as the driven snow". We would not have famous lines like "to

thine own self-be true", from *Hamlet* or "out damn spot" from *Macbeth.* This is why even today he's remembered all over the world.

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