

**Technical terms** you need to know **for** discussing  
language change with **greater precision**

Amelioration	(also known as melioration): Process of semantic change in which there is an upward shift in the meaning of a word – eg “nice” has meant stupid (14 <sup>th</sup> C), loose (14 <sup>th</sup> -16 <sup>th</sup> C), shy (17 <sup>th</sup> -18 <sup>th</sup> C), precise (19 <sup>th</sup> C) and pleasant (20 <sup>th</sup> ): it’s meaning has ‘improved’
Broadening	Sometimes the use of existing words can become broader. For example, the slang word cool was originally part of the professional jargon of jazz musicians and referred to a specific artistic style of jazz (a use that was itself an extension). Later it became a more general word meaning good
Compound words	Adjective compounds (moth-eaten); noun compounds (bagpipe)
Affix (prefix / suffix)	A morpheme that is attached to a word stem to form a new word. Affixes may be derivational, like -ness and pre-, or inflectional, like English plural -s and past tense -ed
Colloquialism	an expression used in ordinary conversation, but not regarded as slang" – eg the word :”ain’t”
Compounding	Compounding is the word-formation that creates compound lexemes (the other word-formation process being derivation). ...
Declension	The inflection of nouns and pronouns is called declension: man, man's men, men's; I, my, me, etc. ...
Derivation	Morphemes can be added to a word to create (derive) another word: the addition of "-ness" to "happy," for example, to give "happiness."
Elevated diction	A written style using formal or archaic vocabulary, such as “thus”.
Euphemism	An inoffensive or indirect expression that is substituted for one that is considered offensive or too harsh (eg “wee wee”).
Case	Nouns or pronouns or adjectives (often marked by inflection) related in some way to other words in a sentence.
Inflection	The modification of a word to express different grammatical categories such as tense, mood, voice, aspect, person, number, gender and case.
Latinate	Words derived from Latin.
Lexicon	The lexicon of a language is its vocabulary, including its words and expressions.

Lexis	All of the words in a language; all word forms having meaning or grammatical function.
Loan word	A word borrowed from one language and incorporated into another.
Modal auxiliaries	(Emerged in English in Middle English period): an auxiliary verb (such as `can' or `will') that is used to express possibility, intention, obligation: CAN, COULD, WILL, WOULD, SHALL, SHOULD, OUGHT TO, DARE and NEED
Progressive tense	The <b>present progressive tense</b> takes the form be + V ing: "He is singing. She is listening." <b>Past progressive</b> : "Donna was doing too much work" <b>Future progressive</b> : "I will be staying with my parents over the summer."
Rune	A letter, or character, belonging to the written language of various ancient Germanic peoples, especially the Scandinavians and the Anglo-Saxons.
Scribes	People whose work is to copy books, including sacred texts, or secretarial and administrative duties such as taking of dictation and the keeping of business, judicial and historical records.
Slang	The nonstandard vocabulary of a given culture or subculture, typically consisting of transitory (short-lived) coinages and figures of speech.
Verbose	An expressive style that uses excessive or empty words.

Geoff Barton  
[www.geoffbarton.co.uk](http://www.geoffbarton.co.uk)

Updated Oct 6 2010