

Words Poorly Used #22 — Etymology

Etymology, as a word itself, is poorly used in its neglect. Too many people do not know from where words make their way to our communications. An important part of using the right word to convey an idea is precision. It would be very difficult to understand a word precisely if one does not know its origin and its evolution. Etymology is not the only important underlying element to a thoroughly precise use of language, but it is necessary. Every person may benefit by evolving their linguistic tools in an optimal way. Etymology is a unique member of that tool set. Let's look at the word, etymology, from an etymological view. The Online Etymology Dictionary tells us that the word and its parts have been in continuous use (of interest to humans who speak modern language) since its origin with the Greeks, and its meaning is the study of the true sense of words. We may modify that in favor of its modern version which includes the study of how the true sense may have changed over time. Our priority as communicators is to be understood, therefore the true sense of a word is critical. One who intends to mislead through miscommunication will be thwarted if the listener is armed with the etymologies of the words used, before taking action responsive to those words. You do not have to carry the etymology in your conscious mind, but you do need to know what etymology is and how to use it — vigorously.

Kilgore