MEANING CRYSTALLIZATION THROUGH PHRASAL VERBS AND IDIOMS

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Abstract:The paper brings forth a series of English phrasal verbs and idioms, intended to enhance that mastering vocabulary is pivotal to communication. Building up one's vocabulary is a never-ending task, generally speaking, and all the more so when learners are determined to immerse themselves in the realm of a foreign language. Bouncing ideas off people and mapping the hustle and bustle of their thoughts amount to as many opportunities for foreign languages learners to increase their language proficiency.

Keywords: linguistic intelligence, vocabulary learning, crutch words, new lexical items, phraseology

1. Premises

The benefits of a multifarious lexis, which empowers any speaker to engage in the process of decoding the world around to an increasingly greater extent, are unquestionable[1]. Speakers' linguistic accuracy would increase if they took more interest in interspersing their daily speech sequences with new lexical items.[2] A rather enticing manner to erase many communication flaws may be *going on a lexical safari*.[3] Young learners nowadays seem to simply lack the knowledge to handle large amounts of terms and expressions, choosing instead to get their message across through the use of *crutch words.*[4]

Furthermore, some of them are likely to eschew lexical tasks claiming that such activities are just tedious and not consistent with the formulaic style, which is sometimes enhanced by the XXI st century society.[5]

2. Teaching Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs are another instance of the fuzziness at the boundary between words and grammar. They are particularly problematic for learners both because of their lexical

[1]https://www.instituteofpublicspeaking.com/public-speaking-tips/top-20-public-speaking-quotes/: *'Speech is power: speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel.'* (Ralph Waldo Emerson), retrieved June 24th, 2019

[2]https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/vocabulary: *'A man with a scant vocabulary will almost certainly be a weak thinker. The richer and more copious one's vocabulary and the greater one's awareness of fine distinctions and subtle nuances of meaning, the more fertile and precise is likely to be one's thinking. Knowledge of things and knowledge of the words for them grow together. If you don't know the words, you can hardly know the thing.'* (Henry Hazlitt), retrieved June 26th, 2019

[3]*Ibid.*: *'To enjoy and learn from what you read, you must understand the meanings of the words a writer uses. You do yourself a grave disservice if you read around words you don't know, or worse, merely guess at what they mean without bothering to look them up. For me, reading has always been not only a quest for pleasure and enlightenment but also a word-hunting expedition, a lexical safari.'* (Charles Harrington Elster), retrieved June 27th, 2019

[4]https://www.dictionary.com/e/s/umwords/#fantastic-great-awesome-super: *'Crutch words slip into sentences in order to give the speaker more time to think or to emphasise a statement. Over time, they become unconscious verbal tics. Most often, crutch words do not add meaning to a statement.[…] When speakers gravitate toward any one of these (or other) words to describe the world around them, it's time to visit the thesaurus for a few peppery alternatives. It's all too easy to fall into the trap of mindlessly regurgitated language. Selecting unique adjectives demonstrates more original thinking.'*, retrieved June 28th, 2019

[5]https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/vocabulary: *'Without a vocabulary, a language, the intellect cannot develop.'* (T. Geronimo Johnson), retrieved July 1st, 2019

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meanings (which are often idiomatic) and their grammatical form. Here is how phrasal verbs are often grouped, according to their grammar:

a) type 1: intransitive e.g. *come to* (recover consciousness); these don't take an object;

b) type 2: transitive inseparable e.g. *look into* (investigate); these must take an object which always comes after the verb;

c) type 3: transitive separable e.g. *put off* (postpone); the object can either come between the verb and the particle or after the verb; if we use a pronoun then it must go between;

d) type 4: three-part, e.g. *put up with* (endure); these are always transitive inseparable. (Thornbury, 2008:123)

Along the same lines, there is a wealth of ways to improve vocabulary: 'The following passage, which comes from a guide to the Cambridge First Certificate in English examination, offers some good advice to students: 1) whenever you read a book, newspaper or text in English, get into the habit of *identifying* and underlining phrasal verbs…; 2) write down in a special notebook the sentences in which they appear; 3) use your English-English dictionary to look up the meaning, and write this after your sentence; 4) try to write your own sentence using the same phrasal verb in a different context; 5) get an English teacher or friend to check that your sentences are correct; 6) limit the number of new phrasal verbs you collect to, say, two or three each day; if you do five or ten minutes' good work with each, you will quickly build up a useful stock of words which you have actually seen used in the English you have read. […] There is more to words than simply *words*. […] an approach that combines frequent and contextualised exposure with consciousness-raising may work best. This is recommended for the teaching of: a) composite words; b) collocations; c) phrasal verbs; d) idioms.' (*Id.*: 125-8)

3. Learning Phrasal Verbs[6]

Foreign languages learners should constantly aim to identify new vocabulary mastering methods, which are ideally suited to them: *'These are some ideas for self-study that may help you to learn and remember phrasal verbs: a) try to read in English, especially informal writing such as tabloid newspapers and novels, and underline all the phrasal verbs you find. Check their meaning in your dictionary and make a note in your vocabulary book. b) Learn the verbs in organized groups rather than randomly. Constantly look back through your vocabulary book – familiarity and repetition help you to learn more effectively. c) Think of a particle and then try and list the different meanings that the particle has. If you can learn the meanings of the particles, it will help you understand new verbs you come across. d) Look at the verbs you have recorded in meaning groups. Try to learn all the verbs, then in your head or in writing, make up a story using as many of the verbs as possible. These stories will help you to remember the context for the verbs*.' (****Phrasal Verbs Dictionary*, 2004: 182)

Moreover, one of the defining features of phrasal verbs is their idiomaticity: "*Sometimes when you meet a multi-word verb, you can understand the meaning if you understand the verb and particle individually. For example, one meaning of 'put down' is to place something somewhere: 'Jack put the books down on the table.' But what does it mean*

[6]Ruth Gairns and Stuart Redman, *Learner's Pocket. Phrasal Verbs &Idioms*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 2: "What are phrasal verbs? A *phrasal verb* consists of a base verb, e.g. *catch* or *look*, and one or two particles (adverb or preposition), e.g. *on* or *to*: 'This new computer game could *catch on.*'
Sometimes the meaning of the phrasal verb is similar to the base verb: 'I'm *staying in* tonight.' Sometimes the meaning is different: 'You need to *keep in with* the manager.' You also need to know whether you can separate the verb and particle. For instance, they are separable in 'He failed the test but tried to *laugh* it *off.*' They are not separable, though, in 'They *laughed at* me because of my clothes.'
One feature of phrasal verbs is that many of them have more than one meaning: a) 'We're *putting on* a concert next month.' b) 'Lucy is *putting on* her make-up.' c) 'Bernie sometimes *puts on* an accent.' Most phrasal verbs are either neutral or informal in style: '*Calm down!* You know Martin only says these things to *wind* you *up*.' "

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in the following sentence? 'She's always putting people down.' It does not mean that she places people somewhere, but that she is always criticizing them. When you see a verb followed by a particle but you cannot understand the meaning in the context from the meaning of the verb and the particle, you have found an idiomatic phrasal verb." (*Id.*: 184)

A phrasal verb is a verb that consists of two or three words; its meaning is different from the meaning those words would have if you considered each one separately. For example, the meaning of *carry out* (=do) in the sentence 'Scientists carried out an experiment.' is not related to the normal meaning of 'carry' or the normal meaning of 'out'. Even though *answer back* (=answer rudely) is related to the meaning of the verb 'answer', this does not help you to understand what *answer back* means.

Most phrasal verbs consist of two words: *get up; go off; turn on; make out,* and *deal with*. The first word is a verb; the second word, called a particle, is either an adverb (such as 'out') or a preposition (such as 'with'). There are also some three-word phrasal verbs: for example, *catch up with, look forward to.*

Verbs which are used with an adverb or preposition but do not combine to produce a special meaning are not phrasal verbs. In sentences such as 'The boy fell off his bike' and 'We carried some chairs out into the garden', 'fall off' and 'carry out' are not phrasal verbs because their meanings can be worked out if you know what 'fall' and 'off', 'carry' and 'out' mean.

Some verbs are only ever used with a particular preposition or adverb: for example, *rely on* and *amount to.* Other phrasal verbs mean almost the same as the verb on its own, but the adverb adds emphasis or contains the idea of an action being completed or continued: for example, *eat up, hurry up, toil away.* Some phrasal verbs are used with 'it' – *hit it off, jump to it* – and others are used with a reflexive pronoun – *pride yourself on, lend itself to.* (****Pocket Phrasal Verbs Dictionary*, 2001: iv)

Many phrasal verbs can be used in a wide range of situations: 'Let's *spread out* and search the whole area.'; 'The neighbours *turned down* our invitation.'; 'The students *put forward* some good ideas.' However, phrasal verbs are most commonly used in spoken English and informal written English. In more formal spoken or written English, there is often a single word equivalent that we use instead: 'Please extinguish all cigarettes now.' *vs.* 'Can you *put* your cigarette *out*, please?'; 'They want to abolish the monarchy.' *vs.* 'They want to *do away with* the monarchy.' (Gairns and Stuart Redman, 2018: 8)

3.1. Grammar of Phrasal Verbs

There are three main types of phrasal verbs: a) phrasal verbs with no object (intransitive); b) phrasal verbs which take an object (transitive) and are separable; c) phrasal verbs which take an object but cannot be separated by the object; these verbs may have one or two particles.

a) Phrasal verbs with no object (intransitive): 1) 'I promised to help; I can't *back out* now.' (*back out*: decide not to do sth that you agreed to do); 2) 'How did the change in policy *come about?*'(*come about*: happen, especially by chance); 3) 'This pain just won't *go away.*' (*go away*: disappear or stop existing).

b) Phrasal verbs which take an object (transitive) and are separable: 1) 'I think the dog *frightened* him *away.*' (*frighten sb/sth away*: make a person or animal so afraid that they run away); 2) 'You may have to *spell out* the reasons, otherwise the students won't understand.' (*spell sth out:* INF, say or explain sth to sb very clearly to make sure that they understand it); 3) 'I said I'd *bring* her book *back* tomorrow.' (*bring sth/ sb back*: return sth/sb) With these verbs, you can usually put the object before or after the particle: 1) 'I *put* your name*down.*' (*put sth down*: write sth on a piece of paper); 2) 'I *put down your name.*' If the object is a

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long phrase, it usually comes after the particle: 'I *put down* everything they asked for.' If the object is a pronoun, it must come between the particle and the verb: 'I *put* it *down*.'

c) Phrasal verbs which take an object but cannot be separated by the object. These verbs may have one or two particles: 1) 'I haven't *heard from* my cousin recently.' (*hear from sb*: if you have *heard from sb*, they have written to you, phoned you, emailed you, etc.); 2) 'We haven't *settled on* a name yet.' (*settle on sth*: if you *settle on sth*, you choose or make a decision about sth after thinking about it); 3) 'They all *went along with* the idea.' (*go along with sb/sth*: agree with a plan or decision that sb has made) (*Id.*: 4-5)

3.2. Nouns from Phrasal Verbs

We create nouns from some phrasal verbs: a) 'I thought the concert was a bit of a *letdown.*' (*letdown:* sth that makes you feel disappointed because it is not as good as you expected it to be);
b) 'We've got two doctors *on standby.*' (*standby:* if you are *on standby*, you are available to help if needed in a particular situation)

These nouns do not always have a related phrasal verb, or one with the same meaning: a) 'There was a two-week *stand-off* in the talks.' (*stand-off*: a situation in which no agreement can be reached); b) There has been a big *breakthrough* in the treatment of diabetes. (*breakthrough:* a discovery or achievement that comes after a lot of hard work).

Many phrasal nouns are written as one word, e.g. *letdown*, but nouns with *-up, -in*, and *-off* are usually written with a hyphen: a) 'The film got a good *write-up* in the paper.' (*write-up:* an article in a paper or magazine in which sb gives their opinion of a new book, film, product, etc.); b) Mrs Gregory will be my *stand-in*. (*stand-in:* sb who takes another person's place, especially at work, for a short period of time).

The plural is usually formed by adding *-s* to the particle: 'Did the teacher give you any *handouts*?' (*handout*: a piece of paper with information, exercises, etc. on it that is given to everyone in a group)

Some phrasal verbs form nouns where the particle is at the beginning. These nouns are written as one word, and the plural form comes at the end of the word: a) 'The *upkeep* of the palace is enormous.' (*upkeep*: the process and cost of keeping sth in good condition); b) 'The company values your *input*.' (*input*: a person's contribution in the form of ideas, information, etc. which help in a process or to make a decision); c) 'When I got to the accident, there were quite a large number of *bystanders.*' (*bystander*: someone who watches what is happening, e.g. an accident, but is not directly involved). (*Id.*: 10-1)

3.3. Adjectives from Phrasal Verbs

A number of adjectives are formed from related phrasal verbs: a) 'There are still *ongoing* discussions.' (*ongoing*: continuing to happen or develop); b) 'The FA Cup is a *knockout* competition.' (*knockout* in a *knockout competition*: only the winning team or players at each stage continue to play in the competition); c) 'Clive's proposal was just a *watered-down* version of the original plan.' (*watered-down*, a *watered-down* idea, plan, statement, etc. has been made less powerful, detailed, offensive, etc. than it was originally); d) 'She made some very *outspoken* remarks.' (*outspoken*: expressing what sb thinks, even if it shocks or upsets people); e) 'The bedroom has two *built-in* wardrobes.' (*built-in*: constructed as part of sth and not separated from it).

The same adjective may correspond with different meanings of the related verb: a) 'The fish was tasty, but the smell was a bit *off-putting.*'(*off-putting:* can describe somebody or something that is unpleasant) *vs.* 'The noise was very *off-putting.*'(*off-putting*: sth that disturbs or distracts you so that you find it difficult to concentrate); b) 'The children were

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worn out after the long walk.' (*worn out*: if sb is *worn out*, they feel very tired, especially after hard work or exercise) *vs.* 'My trainers are pretty *worn out.*' (*worn out*: if sth is *worn out*, it is damaged, or no longer useful, because it has been used a lot).

A phrasal adjective usually has a very similar meaning to the related phrasal verb, but sometimes the meaning changes slightly: a) 'I'm looking for a more *go-ahead* company.' (*go-ahead*: happy to try new ideas, methods, etc. and therefore more likely to succeed). b) 'We can *go ahead* with the new development.' (*go ahead:* start or continue to do sth, especially after getting permission). (*Id.*: 12-3)

4. What Are Idioms?

Idioms are expressions whose meaning is often difficult to understand by looking at the individual words. Seeing idioms in context can sometimes make them clearer: a) 'My parents arrived *out of the blue* today.' (*out of the blue:* INF, suddenly and unexpectedly); b) 'These shoes will be fine *for the time being*.' (*for the time being*: for now and the immediate future); c) 'I'm afraid I *put my foot in it*.' (*put your foot in it*: INF, accidentally say sth that embarrasses, upsets or annoys sb)

Some idioms are easier to understand, but are still called idioms because they are fixed expressions which need to be learnt as whole phrases: a) 'After the break-up, things *went from bad to worse*.' (*go from bad to worse*-of a bad situation: become even worse); b) 'I know enough Spanish to *make myself understood.*' (*make yourself understood*: make your meaning clear, especially in another language)

With some idioms there is a choice of words without changing the meaning: a) 'Are you going? – *It/That depends.*' (*it/that depends*: used when you cannot give a definite answer because different things are possible in the situation); b) 'He arrived *at the last minute/ moment.*' (If you arrive *at the last minute/ moment*, you arrive at the latest possible time before an event; you are almost late.)

Idioms can be formed from such everyday words that you may not notice them or realize they are idioms: a) 'I *didn't think much of* the film.' (*not think much of sth/sb*: not like sth/sb very much); b) 'Karen *is nothing like* her sister.' (*be nothing like sb/sth*: not be similar to sb or sth in any away); c) 'I'm enjoying my new job *so far.*' (*so far*: until now); d) 'The room was *lovely and warm.*' (*lovely and warm, cool, soft, etc.*: used to emphasize the pleasant quality that sth has). (*Id.*: 14-5)

4.1. Business Idioms

The text below is peppered with a plethora of complex business idioms whose knowledge would ensure an effective communication when addressing business-related topics[7]:

[7] *Id.*, pp.184-5: " 'Company Rescue'. Barney Morton describes how he rescued an ailing company:
When I took on(*take sth on*: agree to be responsible for sth) *the greetings card company, it had been going downhill for quite a while*(*go downhill*: get worse in quality, health, etc.), *so I gotdown to* (*get down to sth*: start to do sth, giving it serious attention) *workat once*(*at once*: immediately; without delay)**.** *The first part of the job was the hardest, but there was no way round it: I had to lay offseveral members of staff* (*lay sb off*: stop employing sb because there is not enough work for them to do or money to pay them; SYN *make sb redundant*) *who had been with the company for many years. It also became clear quite quickly that expenditure was spiralling out of control*(*be/get out of control*: be or become impossible to manage), *so I brought in* (*bring sb in*: start to employ sb who has particular skills) *a new accountant to get to grips with* (*get to grips with sth*: begin to understand and deal with sth difficult) *the financial side of things. Stock control was another issue. I realized that if we reduced the amount of stock we held at any one time, it would free up* (*free sth up*: make available sth such as money, time or space that was going to be used for another purpose) *more money for marketing, which had been badly neglected: that we have now started to do. Being a very traditional company, it had not embraced modern technology very quickly. For example, the company hadn't created online greeting cards, and as a consequence* (*as a consequence*: FML, used to say that one thing is the result of another; SYN *in*

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'A Growing Business'. *When Paul Pritchard opened a pharmacy in a small parade of shops on the outskirts of town, few people thought he would ever make a go of it.*(*make a go of sth:* INF, be successful in sth that is difficult or requires effort) *The shop had formerly belonged to* (*belong to* sb: if *sth belongs* to you, it is yours; you own it) a *couple selling fruit and vegetables, and before that it had been a hardware shop; both owners had eventually been forced to close down.(close down:* permanently stop operating or doing business) *Paul, however, thought differently, and firmly believed in* (*believe in sth:* think that an idea or way of doing sth is good or right)*what he was doing. It was touch and go*(*it's touch and go:* INF, used about a situation in which a successful result is possible but not certain)*for several years, but through his energy and enthusiasm he at least managed tobreak even*(*break even:* if a business *breaks even*, it neither makes a profit nor loses money). *Then he had a stroke of luck*(*a stroke of luck*: sth lucky that happens to you unexpectedly)**.** *The small doctor's surgery down the road was rebuilt and extended, and two new doctors were taken on at the practice* (*take sb on*: employ sb). *This had a dramatic knock-on effectonPaul's business* (*have a knock-on effect on sth:* start a process which causes sth to happen, and that then causes sth else to happen), *and the number of people coming into the pharmacy almost doubled at a stroke* (*at a stroke:* with a single action that has an immediate effect). *From then on, Paul gradually built up* (*build sth up:* develop sth over time) *the business, and in five years' time, when he retires, he hopes to be able to pass on* (*pass sth on*: gives sth to sb else, especially after having or using it yourself) *a thriving pharmacy to his nephew, Darren, who is planning to go into the business.*(*go into sth:* start to work in a particular industry or area of activity)(*Id.*: 176-7)

5. Expanding Vocabulary[8]

As Pauline Cullen (2015:115) thoroughly points out, 'There are many ways to learn vocabulary: 1) choose words that look familiar first- you may remember them better; 2) choose the words you learn from a list of frequent words; 3) repeat words aloud so you remember the oral as well as visual aspect of the word; 4) use a mind map to link words together into a topic; 5) use a web browser to make a note of how a word is used; 6) practise using the word with native English speakers; 7) look for the words in exam practice materials; 8) use a variety of techniques so you don't get bored; 9) use a system of index cards with a synonym, antonym and translation on the back; 10) use new words as often as possible; 11) use diagrams and pictures to illustrate new vocabulary; 12) listen to recordings of words or make them yourself; 13) cover the words you learn and guess them from their synonyms and antonyms; 14) remember whether the word is formal, informal, positive or negative; 15) learn vocabulary in lists of 18 or 36 words and revise them before you learn the next set; 16) read English language newspapers and journals every day; 17) read factual passages on unfamiliar topics.'[9]

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consequence) *we were losing out to*(*lose out to sb/sth*: INF, not get business, etc. that you expected because sb/sth else has taken it) *some of our closest competitors. It'll take time, but we've improved on* (*improve on sth*: achieve or produce sth that is of a better quality than sth else) *last year's performance, and I now feel we canturnthe company round.* (*turn sth around/ round*: if a business, economy, etc. *turns around*, or sb *turns it around*, it starts to develop successfully after being unsuccessful for a time)"

[8]https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/vocabulary: 'Everyone has experienced how learning an appropriate name for what was dim and vague cleared up and crystallized the whole matter. Some meaning seems distinct almost within reach, but is elusive; it refuses to condense into definite form; the attaching of a word somehow (just how, it is almost impossible to say) puts limits around the meaning, draws it out from the void, makes it stand out as an entity on its own account.' (John Dewey), retrieved July 3rd, 2019

[9]Pauline Cullen, *Vocabulary for IELTS Advanced*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p.114: "In 1953, Michael West published a General Service List (GSL) of the most frequently used words in English. The list contains over 2,000 headwords. According to West, anyone who knew the first 2,000 words on his list

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5.1. Teaching Lexical Phrases and Collocations

Building up vocabulary is a process that comprises manifold parts: 1) make students aware of phrases and collocations; 2) keep an eye on usefulness and be aware of overloading students; 3) feed in phrases on a 'little but often' basis; 4) introduce phrases in context, but drill them as short chunks; 5) point out patterns in phrases; 6) be ready to answer students' questions briefly; 7) keep written records of phrases as phrases. (Thornbury, 2008: 122)

6. Conclusion

Beyond a shadow of a doubt, an articulate speaker can always fathom out a refreshing perspective on the myriad ways to enrich his vocabulary. Despite the arduous tasks ahead, zealous learners would amalgamate dozens and dozens of words every day. They would also acknowledge that not only is it bad for one's linguistic development to plague the language with commonplace phrases, but it also compromises the chances of being considered a trustworthy and reliable communicator. In collecting one's thoughts, it's significant to gain linguistic skills that add up to great subtlety and a touch of originality. [10]

Speakers should present their ideas with utmost care, eloquently, and without prefacing the statements with *crutch words* or diluting the topics on which they are about to expound, in order to convey confidence, assurance, and expertise.

A common belief is that when delving into the lexical universe, we readily grasp how our thinking skills are often replicated by our speaking skills, hence the chain activities of *learning, discovering, absorbing, comprehending, assimilating*, which eventually lead us to ascend the career ladder.

To conclude, embarking on a lexical journey it's arguably one of the most delightful learning experiences since, to quote Goethe, 'the limits of' our 'language are the limits of' our 'universe.'[11]

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should be able to understand 80% of a written text. Furthermore, the first 1,000 words represent approximately 77% of a written text and the second 1,000 words make up around 5%. Some people feel that West's list is no longer relevant, given its age (it contains words that are no longer in common usage, e.g. shilling, and lacks more recent words such as plastic, digital, computer, etc.). However, recent attempts to replicate the list show an agreement of 80% and the differences are generally concerned with frequency rather than individual words.
In his book, *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*, I.S.P Nation writes: 'In general, high frequency words are so important that anything that teachers and learners can do to make sure they are learned is worth doing.' "

[10] Jean-Claude Carrière, *Cercul mincinoșilor*, București: Humanitas, 2018, pp.138-9, (*my translation)*: 'Jorge Luis Borges used to say that, for his generation, a person who didn't speak French was almost an illiterate and that the world had shifted from French to English, and from English to ignorance. […] Every year, universal platitudes and clichés were wrapping up the planet in a web of easiness, hence of nonsensical mediocrity. […] Rare and beautiful, fine, precious, elegant, baroque, tempting, mysterious, exotic words, exhaling faraway perfumes and vivid colours, all these words were vanishing, being swallowed by the gaping jaw of mediocrity.'

[11] https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/vocabulary, retrieved July 3rd, 2019

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