

Typical examples from COBUILD data for *broom*, to illustrate the process of language change

Ramesh Krishnamurthy, COBUILD Ltd, Birmingham

20.1.93

SECTION A. Definitions from the COBUILD dictionary (1987) followed by examples from the 20-million-word corpus of written and spoken English texts (mostly 1970-85) on which they were based. The corpus contained 112 examples of *broom*, 23 of *brooms*, and 37 of other related forms (*broomstick*, *broom-handle*, etc), and 7 examples for *new broom* (all of which are given below).

1. COBUILD Dictionary (1987)

broom... 1 A **broom** is a kind of brush with a long handle. You use a **broom** for sweeping the floor.

2. Examples from the 20-million-word corpus

s grew bored but would not pick up a broom, and the cheap liquor that made the doorstep, his hands resting on a broom, talking to the charlady. I wai February Alec McGivan arrived with a broom to sweep out the three rooms th p out of that bed, and she grabbed a broom, and she chased those damn swif ssing-table furniture, some mops and brooms and so on. Mrs Rossiter was pl

3. COBUILD Dictionary (1987)

broom... 2 **Broom** is a wild bush with a lot of thorns and tiny yellow flowers which grows on waste ground or sandy ground.

4. Examples from the 20-million-word corpus

dward side, banks of canary-coloured broom cascaded prodigally down from w ear and cherry; leaves and shoots of broom and gorse; privet leaves; onion ctually reflect the heat of the sun. Broom has always been a plant of grea ocky hollow behind a screen of spiky broom. He eased off his rucksack and r many heathy places are ablaze with broom, quite out-shning the gorse it

5. COBUILD Dictionary (1987)

new broom... A person who has just started a new job and who intends to make a lot of changes may be referred to as a **new broom**; an informal expression.

ier Tomlinson explained, "is our new broom," and Castle noticed the way Da open check. You must forgive the new broom. I have to learn the ropes," he see how far below the table the new broom was liable to sweep. He said, " ly today. I said to myself - the new broom may still be sweeping around. A r the very devil to work with. A new broom sweeps clean and all that. I ha . I think we might be in for the new broom business here. You see what I m eart of what?" "Europea. Oh some new broom's bright idea for a new version

SECTION B. Examples from a 100-million-word sample of the Bank of English (COBUILD's current data collection of over 200 million words, mostly post-1986), which contains 352 occurrences for `broom', 30 for `brooms', etc. Looking only at examples of the *new broom* metaphor (about 30 of them):

6. There are examples of *new broom* meaning a person:

...But he is hardly a new broom...
...Adrian Shinwell, president and new broom at the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association...

7. One or two retain *sweep clean* from the proverb:

...The new broom is determined to sweep clean. But she never expected...
...They're still feeling their way, Alec, and new brooms always want to sweep cleaner than the old...

8. But many examples show that *new broom* can now also refer to the policies or changes carried out by the new appointee:

...Heseltine's new broom has yet to show its bristles.
...lending enthusiastic strength to the hand that pushes the new broom.

9. *sweep* can be re-introduced as a pun:

...The new broom that swept in with the new season is held by Tony Russ...
...his new broom has already swept into some dark corners of the Asda empire.

10. *new* can be separated from *broom*:

...Since taking helm back in March, the new chief has wielded the broom through the business and its debts...

11. *new* can be omitted altogether and replaced by the person making the changes:

...as the Kinnock broom swept clean in Walworth Road...

12. The nature of the changes can be specified by replacing *new*:

...Bishko's rationalisation broom has swept through the 253-strong operation...

13. *new broom* can be used like an adjective, in front of another noun referring to a person or a policy:

...the company's new broom chief executive...
...as a result of the `new broom' policy of Ian Rock, the managing director...