

Where Do English Words Come From?

1 How English came to England

- Middle of the 5th millennium BC Celts came to England
- 1st century AD Romans occupied Britain until 410 AD
- The Romans tried to invasion the last celtish groups, the Picts and Scots but they requested help from across the North Sea, the Germanics (Angles, Saxons, Frisians and Jutes)
- The Germanics took Britain over; Anglos Saxon where the new society of Britain
- 7th century the name 'England' comes from the word 'Angli' ('Land of the Angles')
- English has its roots in the Anglo-Frisian Language

2 Historical development of English vocabulary

2.1. The Old English period (450-1066)

- There are only a few written texts out of this time
- Not only words are still similar to the modern English; The OE alphabet is similar too
Except of:
 1. The shape of letters
 2. The absence of some letters (j, v, f, q, x and z)
 3. No capital letters
 4. Numbers were written in Roman
- In Old English texts words could be spelt differently on the same page
- OE has a lot of compounds known as 'kennings' e.g. 'banhus'-'bonehouse' for 'body'
- 85 % of the words of OE are no longer in use

2.2 The Middle English period (1066-1500)

- Has a richer documentation than OE
- 13th century number of English texts increased for the use of teaching the language
- The diversity of spelling was even greater than in OE
- Middle English was very influenced by French
- There was a large amount of compounding, affixation

2.3. Early Modern English period (1500-1800)

- Printing plays a major role in this period
- The beginning of fostering the norms of spelling and pronunciation
- Sciences brought a great amount of new vocabularies to English from the rest of Europe
- The period encompasses the Renaissance (1450-1650)
- Most important influences came from 'Shakespeare' and 'King James Bible'
- France and Italy established Academy to safe their languages;
- English purists weren't successful, so the writing of dictionaries and grammars started
- 1st successful dictionary from Samuel Johnson

2.4. The modern English period (1800-present)

- Great increase of vocabularies because of the industrial revolution and scientific exploration
- The communication techniques developed very fast
- American English became the dominant variety of the language
- AE and BE become more and more alike
- New Englishes developed in the colonial areas

3 Native English vocabulary

3.1 Anglo-Saxon words

- Anglo-Saxon words constitute a central mass; are generally short and concrete

3.2 The influence of Celtic on English

- Celtic has had a rather negligible influence; Celtic-based place names

4 The process of borrowing

- Borrowing refers to “the process of imitation and (partly) adaptation in sound and grammar” of words from foreign languages to a speaker’s native language
- word borrowed is called a ‘loanword’ or ‘borrowing’
- popular loanwords, learned loanwords

4.1 Latin words in English

- total number at the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon period: less than 200 items
 - Latin borrowed freely from Greek; some words are ultimately from Greek origin
 - 500 words were borrowed during the Old English period
 - several hundred words were borrowed in the Middle English period
 - French is the dominant influence on the growth of the vocabulary
 - many words occurred directly from Latin
- Often difficult to tell whether a word is borrowed from French or Latin
- Simultaneous borrowing → highly distinctive feature

4.2 Scandinavian words in English

1. settlements with Danish names
 2. personal names of Scandinavian origin
 3. general words entered
- some Scandinavian words resemble their English cognates
 - difficult to tell, whether the word is English or Scandinavian
 - if the meaning of related words differed, semantic contamination took place

4.3 Greek words in English

- most noticeable in the Early Modern English period; many technical terms; learned

4.4 French words in English

- by the end of the 13th century, some 10.000 words entered, ¾ are still in use today

4.5 German and Dutch words in English

- commercial relationships in the Middle Ages between Flemish/Dutch and English-speaking people → borrowed nautical and commercial terms

4.6 Romance loans other than from French

- Spanish, Portuguese, Italian since the 16th century

4.7 Loans from the East

- words of Arabic origin entered in the Middle English period

4.8 Loans from other sources

- West African, Slavic, Native American languages, Czech, Russian, Hungarian, Turkish

4.9 Sources of most recent loans

- French – largest supplier, geographical proximity
- Spanish – due to American Spanish
- Japanese – due to increase of commercial importance

5 Creating new English words

5.1 Root creation

- the building of a word with no relationship to any previously existing word (*Kodak*)

5.2 Echoic words

- Echoic / onomatopoeic words find their origin in the specific sound that they are meant to represent (*bang, ping*)

5.3 Ejaculations / natural utterances

- Words that attempt to imitate instinctive vocal responses to emotional situations (*ha-ha* for laughter)

5.4 Word formation

- Creation of new lexical items by using existing words and morphemes.
Compounds: *birthday, grandmother, newborn, download*.
Affixation: *celebra-tion, un-know-able*

6 Characteristics of modern English vocabulary

6.1 Size of vocabulary

- There are two biggest dictionaries: the Webster's with 450.000 and the Oxford with 600.000 entries. Combined they would exceed 750.000 entries without "duplicates"
- Written language is preferred; words and expressions that have never been recorded are excluded from lexicography
- Some acronyms have a clear lexical status (*FBI, NATO*)

6.2 Frequency of occurrence and use of Anglo-Saxon words

- The most frequent words in the language are Anglo-Saxon
- Out of 10.000 most frequent words in English only 32% come from "Old English"
- The relative frequency of words varies not only according to the type of text but also to the stylistic level
- We use in an informal everyday situation shorter words like "*start*" instead of "*initiate*" or "*food*" instead of "*nourishment*" and in a formal situation words like "*obnoxious effluvium*" instead of "*nasty smell*"

6.3 'English' vocabulary

- The predominance of foreign words is felt only with the total word stock, for example if we look at the OED to consider the over 600.000 word forms
- Most common items actually used in writing and speech are native English words