

# A SHORT HISTORY OF THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE B.A HONS. -1ST

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## 2 INTRODUCTION

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- The English language was born thanks to the Germanic invaders who came to the British Isles from what is now the northwest of Germany and the Netherlands, (badly called Holland) which is a mere province of this European kingdom), in addition to those of southern Denmark.
- At first, this language was composed of a set of dialects, among which the Western Saxon stood out. Other many and deep influences, coming, above all, from Scandinavian conquerors (in the north and east of England, where they constituted a Danelagh or Danelaw because their laws prevailed over the Anglo-Saxons). To these migrations must be added the Germanic and especially the Normans who came to Britain between the eighth and eleventh centuries. Hence, it can be assured that the current English is, in fact, a conglomerate of influences from Scandinavia and continental Europe. In particular, from France. All these migrations provoked the extinction of the old Celtic languages and the Latin that was spoken in some cities.

# 3 WHAT IS ENGLISH LANGUAGE?

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- Before 100 BC, Britain was populated by a mixture of tribes, including the Celts, Picts, Irish and Cornish. ω They all spoke a variety of Celtic languages.
- The history of the English language really started with the arrival of three Germanic tribes who invaded Britain during the 5th century AD.
- These tribes, the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes, crossed the North Sea from what today is Denmark and northern Germany. At that time the inhabitants of Britain spoke a Celtic language. But most of the Celtic speakers were pushed west and north by the invaders - mainly into what is now Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The Angles came from England and their language was called Englisc - from which the words England and English are derived.
- Germanic invaders entered Britain on the east and south coasts in the 5th century .
- In the 5th century AD, settlers from west Germany crossed over to Britain
- These tribes were called Saxons, Jutes and Angles, and set up kingdoms called 'East Anglia', 'West Saxon', 'East Saxon' etc.
- They spoke a dialect of the Germanic language and this slowly evolved into the English we speak today.



# 4 OLD ENGLISH

- **Old English (450-1100 AD)**
- The language spoken by the Germanic settlers developed differently to the forms found in what is now known as Germany.
- This early form of English is known as 'Old English'.
- The invading Germanic tribes spoke similar languages, which in Britain developed into what we now call Old English. Old English did not sound or look like English today.
- Native English speakers now would have great difficulty understanding Old English.
- Nevertheless, about half of the most commonly used words in Modern English have Old English roots. The words be , strong and water , for example, derive from Old English.
- Old English was spoken until around 1100.
- Viking invaders started arriving in north east England in the 8th century.
- Parts of their Scandinavian language (which is closely related to Germanic languages too) , including words describing family and animals, spread through northern England.
- These words were integrated into Old English.



# 5 MIDDLE ENGLISH

- **Middle English (1100-1500)**

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- When the Normans invaded in 1066, French became the dominant language (of court, the church, and the nobility) while the rest of the country spoke versions of English.
- Gradually, English became more widely used by the educated upper classes and by 1425 English was used universally again in speech and writing.
- However, it had changed completely since the Old English period and became known as Middle English. Middle English (c. 1100–1450 AD)
- In 1066 William the Conqueror, the Duke of Normandy (part of modern France), invaded and conquered England. The new conquerors (called the Normans) brought with them a kind of French, which became the language of the Royal Court, and the ruling and business classes.
- For a period there was a kind of linguistic class division, where the lower classes spoke English and the upper classes spoke French.
- In the 14th century English became dominant in Britain again, but with many French words added. This language is called Middle English. It was the language of the great poet Chaucer (c1340-1400), but it would still be difficult for native English speakers to understand today



## 6 FEATURES OF MIDDLE ENGLISH

- **Features of Middle English**

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- Heavily influenced by Middle English especially legal, religious and administrative terms such as justice, jury, govern and sovereign. French lexis became much simpler, reflecting the way the two languages had to co-exist inflections disappeared (all plurals ended -en, -es or -s. grammar Go to the 'Ages of English' interactive timeline at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/> to listen to Old and Middle English texts.
- Features of Middle English pronunciation was changing with vowels becoming shorter, e.g. leef became life and teem became time. known as the Great Vowel Shift an estimated 85% of Old English words fell out of use after the Viking and Norman invasions no standardised system of spelling pronunciation thousands of Latin words, found in French, replaced Old English terms Latin words Middle English
- In 1476, William Caxton introduced the printing press to Britain. ω Many texts could now be mass-produced, which meant that there was a move towards standardisation in how they were printed, in terms of spelling and punctuation. ω Many Greek and Latin texts were translated into English. ω Caxton chose the East Midlands (London, Oxford, Cambridge) dialect to print works in. This soon became the most prestigious form of English.

# 7 EARLY MODERN ENGLISH

- **Early Modern English (1500-1800)**
- Towards the end of Middle English, a sudden and distinct change in pronunciation (the Great Vowel Shift) started, with vowels being pronounced shorter and shorter.
- From the 16th century the British had contact with many peoples from around the world. This, and the Renaissance of Classical learning, meant that many new words and phrases entered the language. The invention of printing also meant that there was now a common language in print.
- Books became cheaper and more people learned to read. Printing also brought standardization to English. Spelling and grammar became fixed, and the dialect of London, where most publishing houses were, became the standard. In 1604 the first English dictionary was published.
- Features of Early Modern English brought words from African, Asian and New World languages world exploration a huge number of Latin, French and Greek words entered the English language: words were needed for new concepts like psychology European Renaissance coined around 1700 new words, such as courtship, excitement and outbreak Shakespeare Early Modern English
- More than half of our modern English vocabulary is Latinate (of Latin origin), e.g. colossal, dignified, emotion, and history. Most of our prefixes and suffixes come from Latin, e.g. anti-, post-, pre-, -al, -ate, -ic. Influences of Latin

## 8 LATE MODERN ENGLISH

- Late Modern English (1800-Present)
- From 1700 onwards, English became more standardised and similar to the language we recognise today. In 1755, Samuel Johnson finished the first 'Dictionary of English'. Many writers had attempted this before but his version was more comprehensive than ever before. In 1762, Robert Lowth published the first English grammar book, which laid out some of the fundamental rules for 'correct' usage.
- The main difference between Early Modern English and Late Modern English is **vocabulary**.
- Late Modern English has many more words, arising from two principal factors: firstly, the Industrial Revolution and technology created a need for new words;
- Secondly, the British Empire at its height covered one quarter of the earth's surface, and the English language adopted foreign words from many countries.



# 9 LATE MODERN ENGLISH

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- During this time, many writers made attempts to define the lexicon and grammar of English (Johnson, Lowth etc). ω This led to a view that some non-standard varieties of English were inferior – this is called Prescriptivism. ω Latin was upheld as the ideal language and used a model for English grammar, even though it had a very different structure. Standardisation and prescriptivism
- Rail travel, colonial expansion, the spread of literacy and mass production of the printed word extended everyone's access to a standard written form of English.
- The Industrial Revolution changed the way people worked and lived their lives, so new words were needed. English borrowed huge numbers of words from all over the world. American English was becoming a language in its own right, with its own rules and spelling.

# 10 ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

- **English is now a world language of communication.**
- Electronic media like mobile phones and the internet have radically changed the way we communicate with each other. A more colloquial and casual style of language reflects major social changes. Estuary English (a south-eastern dialect) has become widespread in UK. American English increasingly influences British English and English
- **Late Modern English** •
- Began in the 1800s and is the English that we speak today • Same as Early Modern English, but has richer vocabulary
- BRITISH EMPIRE Colonized many nations • Words were borrowed (i.e. pajamas and shampoo from Hindi, tycoon from Japanese, and sauna from Finnish) and added to the English vocabulary
- • Other words have Latin or Greek roots (i.e. biology, oxygen) World War I and World War II
- • American soldiers collaborated with British soldiers
- • Military slang words were created • blockbuster, nosedive, camouflage, radar, roadblock, spearhead, and landing strip worldwide.



## II REFERENCES

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