

HISTORY OF ENGLISH

[English](#) is a [West Germanic language](#) that originated from the [Anglo-Frisian dialects](#) brought to [Britain](#) by [Germanic invaders](#) from various parts of what is now northwest [Germany](#) and the [Netherlands](#). Initially, [Old English](#) was a diverse group of dialects, reflecting the varied origins of the [Anglo-Saxon](#) kingdoms of England. One of these dialects, [Late West Saxon](#), eventually came to dominate.

English changed enormously in the Middle Ages. Written Old English of 1000 AD is similar in vocabulary and grammar to other old Germanic languages such as [Old High German](#) and [Old Norse](#), and completely unintelligible to modern speakers, while the modern language is already largely recognizable in written Middle English of 1400 AD. This was caused by two further waves of invasion: the first by speakers of the [Scandinavian branch](#) of the Germanic language family, who conquered and colonized parts of Britain in the 8th and 9th centuries; the second by the [French Normans in the 11th century](#), who spoke [Old Norman](#) and ultimately developed an English variety of this called [Anglo-Norman](#). About 60% of the modern English vocabulary comes direct from [Old French](#).^[1]

Cohabitation with the [Scandinavians](#) resulted in a significant grammatical simplification and lexical enrichment of the [Anglo-Frisian](#) core of English. However, this had not reached southwest England by the 9th century AD, where Old English was developed into a fully-fledged literary language. This was completely disrupted by the Norman invasion in 1066, and when literary English rose anew in the 13th century, it was based on the speech of [London](#), much closer to the center of Scandinavian settlement. Technical and cultural vocabulary was largely derived from [Old French](#), with heavy influence from [Norman French](#) in the courts and government. With the coming of the [Renaissance](#), as with most other developing European languages such as [German](#) and [Dutch](#), [Latin](#) and [Ancient Greek](#) supplanted French as the main source of new words. Thus, English developed into very much a "[borrowing](#)" language with an enormously disparate [vocabulary](#)

The languages of [Germanic peoples](#) gave rise to the English language (the [Angles](#), [Saxons](#), [Frisii](#), [Jutes](#) and possibly the [Franks](#), who traded and fought with the [Latin-speaking Roman Empire](#) in the centuries-long process of the Germanic peoples' expansion into Western Europe during the [Migration Period](#)). Some Latin words for common objects entered the vocabulary of these Germanic peoples before their arrival in Britain and their subsequent formation of England.

The main source of information for the culture of the [Germanic peoples](#) (the ancestors of the English) in ancient times is [Tacitus' Germania](#), written around 100 AD. While remaining conversant with [Roman civilisation](#) and its economy, including serving in the [Roman military](#), they retained political independence. Some Germanic troops served in [Britannia](#) under the Romans. It is unlikely that Germanic settlement in Britain was intensified (except for Frisians) until the arrival of mercenaries in the 5th century as described by [Gildas](#). As it was, the [Angles](#), [Saxons](#) and [Jutes](#) arrived as [Germanic pagans](#), independent of Roman control.

According to the [Anglo-Saxon Chronicle](#), around the year 449, [Vortigern](#), King of the [Britons](#), invited the "Angle kin" (Angles allegedly led by the Germanic brothers [Hengist and Horsa](#)) to

help him in conflicts with the [Picts](#). In return, the Angles were granted lands in the southeast of Britain. Further aid was sought, and in response "came men of Ald Seaxum of Anglum of Iotum" ([Saxons](#), [Angles](#) and [Jutes](#)). The *Chronicle* talks of a subsequent influx of settlers who eventually established seven kingdoms, known as the [heptarchy](#). However, modern scholars view the figures of Hengist and Horsa as [Euhemerized](#) deities from [Anglo-Saxon paganism](#), who ultimately stem from the [religion](#) of the [Proto-Indo-Europeans](#).^[2]

The invaders' Germanic language displaced the indigenous [Brythonic languages](#) in most of the areas of [Great Britain](#) that were later to become [England](#). The original [Celtic languages](#) remained in parts of [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Cornwall](#) (where [Cornish](#) was spoken into the 19th century). The Germanic dialects combined to form what is now called [Old English](#). The most famous surviving work from the Old English period is the [epic poem](#) *Beowulf* composed by an unknown poet.

Old English did not sound or look like the [Standard English](#) of today. Any native English speaker of today would find Old English unintelligible without studying it as a separate language. 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; and many non-standard dialects such as [Scots](#) and [Northumbrian English](#) have retained many features of Old English in vocabulary and pronunciation.^[3] Old English was spoken until sometime in the 12th or 13th century.^{[4][5]}

Later, English was strongly influenced by the [North Germanic](#) language [Old Norse](#), spoken by the [Norsemen](#) who invaded and settled mainly in the north-east of England (see [Jórvík](#) and [Danelaw](#)). The new and the earlier settlers spoke languages from different branches of the Germanic family; many of their lexical roots were the same or similar, although their grammars were more distinct.

The Germanic language of these Old English-speaking inhabitants was influenced by contact with Norse invaders, which might have been responsible for some of the morphological simplification of Old English, including the loss of [grammatical gender](#) and explicitly marked [case](#) (with the notable exception of the pronouns). English words of Old Norse origin include [anger](#), [bag](#), [both](#), [hit](#), [law](#), [leg](#), [same](#), [skill](#), [sky](#), [take](#), and many others, possibly even including the [pronoun](#) *they*.

The introduction of [Christianity](#) added another wave of [Latin](#) and some [Greek](#) words. The Old English period formally ended sometime after the [Norman conquest](#) (starting in 1066 AD), when the language was influenced to an even greater extent by the [Norman](#)-speaking [Normans](#). The use of Anglo-Saxon to describe a merging of Anglian and Saxon languages and cultures is a relatively modern development

For about 300 years following the [Norman Conquest](#) in 1066, the Norman kings and their high nobility spoke only one of the [French *langues d'oïl*](#), that we call [Anglo-Norman](#), which was a variety of [Old Norman](#) used in [England](#) and to some extent elsewhere in the [British Isles](#) during the [Anglo-Norman](#) period and originating from a northern dialect of [Old French](#), whilst English continued to be the language of the common people. [Middle English](#) was influenced by both Anglo-Norman and, later, Anglo-French (see [characteristics of the Anglo-Norman language](#)).

Even after the decline of Norman-French, standard French retained the status of a formal or [prestige language](#) - as with most of Europe during the period - and had a significant influence on the language, which is visible in Modern English today (see [English language word origins](#) and [List of English words of French origin](#)). A tendency for French-derived words to have more formal connotations has continued to the present day; most modern English speakers would consider a "cordial reception" (from French) to be more formal than a "hearty welcome" (Germanic). Another example is the very unusual construction of the words for animals being separate from the words for their meat: *e.g.*, beef and pork (from the French *bœuf* and *porc*) being the products of 'cows' and 'pigs', animals with Germanic names.

English was also influenced by the Celtic languages it was displacing, especially the [Brittonic substrate](#), most notably with the introduction of the [continuous aspect](#)—a feature found in many modern languages but developed earlier and more thoroughly in English.^[6]

While the [Anglo-Saxon Chronicle](#) continued until 1154, most other literature from this period was in [Old Norman](#) or [Latin](#). A large number of Norman words were taken into Old English, with many doubling for Old English words. The Norman influence is the hallmark of the linguistic shifts in English over the period of time following the invasion, producing what is now referred to as [Middle English](#).

The most famous writer from the [Middle English](#) period was [Geoffrey Chaucer](#), and [The Canterbury Tales](#) is his best-known work.

English literature started to reappear around 1200, when a changing political climate and the decline in [Anglo-Norman](#) made it more respectable. The [Provisions of Oxford](#), released in 1258, was the first English government document to be published in the English language since the Conquest. In 1362, [Edward III](#) became the first king to address Parliament in English. By the end of that century, even the royal court had switched to English. Anglo-Norman remained in use in limited circles somewhat longer, but it had ceased to be a living language.

[English spelling](#) was also influenced by Norman in this period, with the /θ/ and /ð/ sounds being spelled *th* rather than with the Old English letters [þ \(thorn\)](#) and [ð \(eth\)](#), which did not exist in Norman. These letters remain in the modern [Icelandic alphabet](#), which is descended from the alphabet of [Old Norse](#)

Early Modern English

Main article: [Early Modern English](#)

[Modern English](#) is often dated from the [Great Vowel Shift](#), which took place mainly during the 15th century. English was further transformed by the spread of a standardised London-based dialect in government and administration and by the standardising effect of printing. By the time of [William Shakespeare](#) (mid-late 16th century),^[7] the language had become clearly recognizable as Modern English. In 1604, the first English dictionary was published, the [Table Alphabeticall](#).

English has continuously adopted foreign words, especially from [Latin](#) and [Greek](#), since the Renaissance. (In the 17th century, Latin words were often used with the original inflections, but these eventually disappeared). As there are many words from different languages and English spelling is variable, the risk of [mispronunciation](#) is high, but remnants of the older forms remain in a few regional dialects, most notably in the [West Country](#).

Modern English

Main article: [Modern English](#)

In 1755, [Samuel Johnson](#) published the first significant English dictionary, his [Dictionary of the English Language](#).

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.

English is a [West Germanic language](#) that arose in the [Anglo-Saxon](#) kingdoms of [England](#) and spread into what was to become south-east [Scotland](#) under the influence of the [Anglian](#) medieval kingdom of [Northumbria](#). Following the economic, political, military, scientific, cultural, and colonial influence of [Great Britain](#) and the [United Kingdom](#) from the 18th century, via the [British Empire](#), and of the [United States](#) since the mid-20th century,^{[5][6][7][8]} it has been [widely dispersed](#) around the world, become the [leading language](#) of international discourse, and has acquired use as *lingua franca* in many regions.^{[9][10]} It is widely learned as a [second language](#) and used as an [official language](#) of the [European Union](#) and many [Commonwealth](#) countries, as well as in many world organizations. It is the [third most natively spoken](#) language in the world, after [Mandarin Chinese](#) and [Spanish](#).^[11]

Historically, English originated from the fusion of languages and dialects, now collectively termed [Old English](#), which were brought to the eastern coast of Great Britain by Germanic ([Anglo-Saxon](#)) settlers by the 5th century – with the word *English* being derived from the name of the [Angles](#).^[12] A significant number of English words are constructed based on roots from [Latin](#), because Latin in some form was the *lingua franca* of the Christian Church and of European intellectual life.^[13] The language was further influenced by the [Old Norse language](#) due to [Viking invasions](#) in the 8th and 9th centuries.

The [Norman conquest of England](#) in the 11th century gave rise to heavy borrowings from [Norman-French](#), and vocabulary and spelling conventions began to give the superficial appearance of a close relationship with [Romance languages](#)^{[14][15]} to what had now become [Middle English](#). The [Great Vowel Shift](#) that began in the south of England in the 15th century is one of the historical events that mark the emergence of [Modern English](#) from Middle English.

Owing to the significant assimilation of various European languages throughout history, modern English contains a very large vocabulary. The [Oxford English Dictionary](#) lists over 250,000

distinct words, not including many technical or [slang](#) terms, or words that belong to multiple word classes.^[16]

Modern English, sometimes described as the first global [lingua franca](#),^{[18][19]} is the [dominant language](#) or in some instances even the required [international language](#) of communications, science, information technology, business, seafaring,^[20] aviation,^[21] entertainment, radio and diplomacy.^[22] Its spread beyond the [British Isles](#) began with the growth of the [British Empire](#), and by the late 19th century its reach was truly global.^[3] Following [British colonisation](#) from the 16th to 19th centuries, it became the dominant language in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The growing economic and cultural influence of the US and its status as a global [superpower](#) since World War II have significantly accelerated the language's spread across the planet.^[19] English replaced [German](#) as the dominant language of science [Nobel Prize](#) laureates during the second half of the 20th century^[23] (compare the [Evolution of Nobel Prizes by country](#)).

A working knowledge of English has become a requirement in a number of fields, occupations and professions such as medicine and computing; as a consequence over a billion people speak English to at least a basic level (see [English language learning and teaching](#)). It is one of six official languages of the [United Nations](#).

One impact of the growth of English is the reduction of native [linguistic diversity](#) in many parts of the world. Its influence continues to play an important role in [language attrition](#).^[24] Conversely, the natural internal variety of English along with [creoles](#) and [pidgins](#) have the potential to produce new distinct languages from English over time.^[25]

History

Main article: [History of the English language](#)

English is a [West Germanic](#) language that originated from the [Anglo-Frisian](#) and [Old Saxon](#) dialects brought to [Britain](#) by [Germanic](#) settlers from various parts of what is now northwest [Germany](#), Denmark and the Netherlands.^[26] Up to that point, in [Roman Britain](#) the native population is assumed to have spoken the [Celtic language Brythonic](#) alongside the [acrolectal](#) influence of Latin, from the 400-year [Roman occupation](#).^[27]

One of these incoming Germanic tribes was the [Angles](#),^[28] whom [Bede](#) believed to have relocated entirely to Britain.^[29] The names 'England' (from *Engla land*^[30] "Land of the Angles") and *English* (Old English *Englisc*^[31]) are derived from the name of this tribe—but [Saxons](#), [Jutes](#) and a range of Germanic peoples from the coasts of [Frisia](#), [Lower Saxony](#), [Jutland](#) and Southern [Sweden](#) also moved to Britain in this era.^{[32][33][34]}

Initially, [Old English](#) was a diverse group of dialects, reflecting the varied origins of the [Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Great Britain](#)^[35] but one of these dialects, [Late West Saxon](#), eventually came to dominate, and it is in this that the poem [Beowulf](#) is written.

Old English was later transformed by two waves of invasion. The first was by speakers of the [North Germanic](#) language branch when [Halfdan Ragnarsson](#) and [Ivar the Boneless](#) started the conquering and colonisation of northern parts of the British Isles in the 8th and 9th centuries (see [Danelaw](#)). The second was by speakers of the [Romance language Old Norman](#) in the 11th century with the [Norman conquest of England](#). Norman developed into [Anglo-Norman](#), and then [Anglo-French](#) – and introduced a layer of words especially via the courts and government. As well as extending the lexicon with Scandinavian and Norman words these two events also simplified the grammar and transformed English into a borrowing language—more than normally open to accept new words from other languages.

The linguistic shifts in English following the Norman invasion produced what is now referred to as [Middle English](#), with [Geoffrey Chaucer's](#) *[The Canterbury Tales](#)* being the best known work.

Throughout all this period Latin in some form was the *lingua franca* of European intellectual life, first the [Medieval Latin](#) of the Christian Church, but later the [humanist Renaissance Latin](#), and those that wrote or copied texts in Latin^[13] commonly coined new terms from Latin to refer to things or concepts for which there was no existing native English word.

[Modern English](#), which includes the works of [William Shakespeare](#)^[36] and the [King James Bible](#), is generally dated from about 1550, and when the United Kingdom became a colonial power, English served as the lingua franca of the colonies of the [British Empire](#). In the post-colonial period, some of the newly created nations which had multiple [indigenous languages](#) opted to continue using English as the lingua franca to avoid the political difficulties inherent in promoting any one indigenous language above the others. As a result of the growth of the British Empire, English was adopted in North America, India, Africa, Australia and many other regions, a trend extended with the emergence of the United States as a superpower in the mid-20th century.

Classification and related languages

The English language belongs to the [Anglo-Frisian](#) sub-group of the [West Germanic](#) branch of the [Germanic family](#), a member of the [Indo-European languages](#). Modern English is the direct descendant of [Middle English](#), itself a direct descendant of [Old English](#), a descendant of [Proto-Germanic](#). Typical of most Germanic languages, English is characterised by the use of [modal verbs](#), the division of verbs into [strong](#) and [weak](#) classes, and common sound shifts from [Proto-Indo-European](#) known as [Grimm's Law](#). The closest living relatives of English are the [Scots language](#) (spoken primarily in [Scotland](#) and parts of [Ireland](#)) and [Frisian](#) (spoken on the southern fringes of the [North Sea](#) in [Denmark](#), the [Netherlands](#), and [Germany](#)).

After Scots and Frisian come those Germanic languages that are more distantly related: the non-Anglo-Frisian [West Germanic languages](#) ([Dutch](#), [Afrikaans](#), [Low German](#), [High German](#)), and the [North Germanic languages](#) ([Swedish](#), [Danish](#), [Norwegian](#), [Icelandic](#), and [Faroese](#)). With the exception of Scots, none of the other languages is mutually intelligible with English, owing in part to the divergences in [lexis](#), [syntax](#), [semantics](#), and [phonology](#), and to the isolation afforded to the English language by the British Isles, although some, such as Dutch, do show strong affinities with English, especially to earlier stages of the language. Isolation has allowed English

and Scots (as well as Icelandic and Faroese) to develop independently of the Continental Germanic languages and their influences over time.^[37]

In addition to isolation, lexical differences between English and other Germanic languages exist due to heavy borrowing in English of words from Latin and French. For example, compare "exit" (Latin), vs. Dutch *uitgang*, literally "out-going" (though *outgang* survives dialectally in restricted usage) and "change" (French) vs. German *Änderung* (literally "alteration, othering"); "movement" (French) vs. German *Bewegung* ("be-way-ing", i.e. "proceeding along the way"); etc. Preference of one synonym over another also causes differentiation in lexis, even where both words are Germanic, as in English *care* vs. German *Sorge*. Both words descend from [Proto-Germanic](#) **karō* and **surgō* respectively, but **karō* has become the dominant word in English for "care" while in German, Dutch, and Scandinavian languages, the **surgō* root prevailed. **Surgō* still survives in English, however, as *sorrow*.

In English, all basic grammatical particles added to nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are Germanic. For nouns, these include the normal plural marker *-s/-es*, and the possessive markers *'s* and *-s'*. For verbs, these include the third person present ending *-s/-es* (e.g. *he stands/he reaches*), the present participle ending *-ing*, the simple past tense and past participle ending *-ed*, and the formation of the English infinitive using *to* (e.g. "*to drive*"; cf. Old English *tō drīfenne*). Adverbs generally receive an *-ly* ending, and adjectives and adverbs are inflected for the comparative and superlative using *-er* and *-est* (e.g. *fast/faster/fastest*), or through a combination with *more* and *most*. These particles append freely to all English words regardless of origin (*tsunamis; communicates; to buccaneer; during; bizarrely*) and all derive from Old English. Even the lack or absence of affixes, known as [zero or null \(-Ø\) affixes](#), derive from endings which previously existed in Old English (usually *-e, -a, -u, -o, -an*, etc.), that later weakened to *e*, and have since ceased to be pronounced and spelt (e.g. Modern English "I sing" = *I sing-Ø* < *I singe* < Old English *ic singe*; "we thought" = *we thought-Ø* < *we thoughte(n)* < Old English *wē þōhton*).

Although the syntax of English is somewhat different from that of other West Germanic languages with regards to the placement and order of verbs (for example, "I **have** never **seen** anything in the square" = German *Ich habe nie etwas auf dem Platz gesehen*, and the Dutch *Ik heb nooit iets op het plein gezien*, where the participle is placed at the end), English syntax continues to adhere closely to that of the North Germanic languages, which are believed to have influenced English syntax during the Middle English Period (e.g., Danish *Jeg har aldrig set noget på torvet*; Icelandic *Ég hef aldrei séð neitt á torginu*). As in most Germanic languages, English adjectives usually come before the noun they modify, even when the adjective is of Latinate origin (e.g. *medical emergency, national treasure*). Also, English continues to make extensive use of [self-explaining compounds](#) (e.g. *streetcar, classroom*), and nouns which serve as modifiers (e.g. *lamp post, life insurance company*), a trait inherited from Old English (See also [Kenning](#)).

The kinship with other Germanic languages can also be seen in the large amount of [cognates](#) (e.g. Dutch *zenden*, German *senden*, English *send*; Dutch *goud*, German *Gold*, English *gold*, etc.). It also gives rise to [false friends](#) (e.g. English *time* vs Norwegian *time*, meaning "hour"; English *gift* vs German *Gift*, meaning "poison"), while differences in phonology can obscure

words that really are related (*tooth* vs. German *Zahn*; compare also Danish *tand*). Sometimes both semantics *and* phonology are different (German *Zeit* ("time") is related to English "tide", but the English word, through a transitional phase of meaning "period"/"interval", has come primarily to mean gravitational effects on the ocean by the moon, though the original meaning is preserved in forms like *tidings* and *betide*, and phrases such as *to tide over*).^{[[citation needed](#)]}

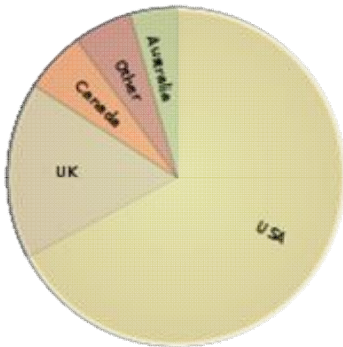
Many [North Germanic words entered English](#) due to the settlement of Viking raiders and Danish invasions which began around the 9th century (see [Danelaw](#)). Many of these words are common words, often mistaken for being native, which shows how close-knit the relations between the English and the Scandinavian settlers were (See below: [Old Norse origins](#)). Dutch and Low German also had a considerable influence on English vocabulary, contributing common everyday terms and many nautical and trading terms (See below: [Dutch and Low German origins](#)).

Finally, English has been forming compound words and affixing existing words separately from the other Germanic languages for over 1500 years and has different habits in that regard. For instance, abstract nouns in English may be formed from native words by the suffixes "-hood", "-ship", "-dom" and "-ness". All of these have cognate suffixes in most or all other Germanic languages, but their usage patterns have diverged, as German "Freiheit" vs. English "freedom" (the suffix "-heit" being cognate of English "-hood", while English "-dom" is cognate with German "-tum"). The Germanic languages Icelandic and Faroese also follow English in this respect, since, like English, they developed independent of German influences.

Many [French](#) words are also intelligible to an English speaker, especially when they are seen in writing (as pronunciations are often quite different), because English absorbed a large vocabulary from [Norman](#) and French, via [Anglo-Norman](#) after the Norman Conquest, and directly from French in subsequent centuries. As a result, a large portion of English vocabulary is derived from French, with some minor spelling differences (e.g. inflectional endings, use of old French spellings, lack of [diacritics](#), etc.), as well as occasional divergences in meaning of so-called false friends: for example, compare "[library](#)" with the French *librairie*, which means [bookstore](#); in French, the word for "library" is *bibliothèque*. The pronunciation of most French loanwords in English (with the exception of a handful of more recently borrowed words such as *mirage*, *genre*, *café*; or phrases like *coup d'état*, *rendez-vous*, etc.) has become largely anglicised and follows a typically English phonology and pattern of stress (compare English "nature" vs. French *nature*, "button" vs. *bouton*, "table" vs. *table*, "hour" vs. *heure*, "reside" vs. *résider*, etc.).^{[[citation needed](#)]}

Geographical distribution

See also: [List of countries by English-speaking population](#)



☐ Pie chart showing the relative numbers of native English speakers in the major English-speaking countries of the world

Approximately 375 million people speak English as their [first language](#).^[38] English today is probably the third largest language by number of native speakers, after [Mandarin Chinese](#) and [Spanish](#).^{[11][39]} However, when combining native and non-native speakers it is probably the most commonly spoken language in the world, though possibly second to a combination of the [Chinese languages](#) (depending on whether or not distinctions in the latter are classified as "languages" or "dialects").^{[40][41]}

Estimates that include [second language](#) speakers vary greatly from 470 million to over a billion depending on how [literacy](#) or mastery is defined and measured.^{[42][43]} Linguistics professor [David Crystal](#) calculates that non-native speakers now outnumber native speakers by a ratio of 3 to 1.^[44]

The countries with the highest populations of native English speakers are, in descending order: [United States](#) (215 million),^[45] [United Kingdom](#) (61 million),^[46] [Canada](#) (18.2 million),^[47] [Australia](#) (15.5 million),^[48] [Nigeria](#) (4 million),^[49] [Ireland](#) (3.8 million),^[46] [South Africa](#) (3.7 million),^[50] and [New Zealand](#) (3.6 million) 2006 Census.^[51]

Countries such as the Philippines, Jamaica and Nigeria also have millions of native speakers of [dialect continua](#) ranging from an [English-based creole](#) to a more standard version of English. Of those nations where English is spoken as a second language, India has the most such speakers ('[Indian English](#)'). Crystal claims that, combining native and non-native speakers, India now has more people who speak or understand English than any other country in the world.^{[52][53]}

English as a global language

See also: [English in computing](#), [International English](#), [World language](#), and [English as a foreign or second language](#)

Because English is so widely spoken, it has often been referred to as a "[world language](#)", the [lingua franca](#) of the modern era,^[19] and while it is not an official language in most countries, it is currently the language most often taught as a [foreign language](#). Some linguists believe that it is no longer the exclusive cultural property of "native English speakers", but is rather a language

that is absorbing aspects of cultures worldwide as it continues to grow.^[19] It is, by international treaty, the official language for aerial and maritime communications.^[62] English is an official language of the [United Nations](#) and many other international organisations, including the [International Olympic Committee](#).

English is the language most often studied as a foreign language in the European Union, by 89% of schoolchildren, ahead of French at 32%, while the perception of the usefulness of foreign languages amongst Europeans is 68% in favour of English ahead of 25% for French.^[63] Among some non-English speaking EU countries, a large percentage of the adult population can converse in English – in particular: 85% in Sweden, 83% in Denmark, 79% in the Netherlands, 66% in Luxembourg and over 50% in Finland, Slovenia, Austria, Belgium, and Germany.^[64]

Books, magazines, and newspapers written in English are available in many countries around the world, and English is the most commonly used language in the sciences^[19] with [Science Citation Index](#) reporting as early as 1997 that 95% of its articles were written in English, even though only half of them came from authors in English-speaking countries.

This increasing use of the English language globally has had a large impact on many other languages, leading to [language shift](#) and even [language death](#),^[65] and to claims of [linguistic imperialism](#).^[66] English itself is now open to [language shift](#) as multiple [regional varieties](#) feed back into the language as a whole.^[66] For this reason, the 'English language is forever evolving'.^[67]

What is English?

History of the English Language

A short history of the origins and development of English

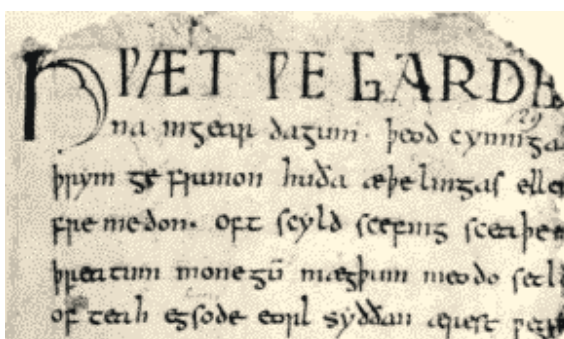
The history of the English language really started with the arrival of three Germanic tribes who invaded Britain during the 5th century AD. These tribes, the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes, crossed the North Sea from what today is Denmark and northern Germany. At that time the inhabitants of Britain 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.

Old English (450-1100 AD)

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.



Part of *Beowulf*, a poem written in Old English.

Middle English (1100-1500)

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.

And whan I sawgh he wolde never fine
To reden on this cursed book at night,
Al sodeinly three leves have I plight
Out of his book right as he redde, and eke
I with my fist so took him on the cheeke
That in oure fir he fil bakward adown.
And up he sterte as dooth a wood leon
And with his fist he smoot me on the heed
That in the floor I lay as I were deed.
And whan he swagh how stille that I lay,
He was agast, and wolde have fled his way,
Till atte laste out of my swough I braide:
"O hastou slain me, false thief?" I saide,
"And for my land thus hastou mordred me?
Er I be deed yit wol I kisse thee."

An example of Middle English by Chaucer.

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.

Enter Hamlet.
Cor. Madame, will it please your grace
To leave vs here?
Que. With all my hart. *exit.*
Cor. And here *Ofelia*, reade you on this booke,
And walke aloofe, the King shal be vnscene.
Ham. To be, or not to be, I here's the point,
To Die, to sleepe, is that all? I all:
No, to sleepe, to dreame, I mary there it goes,
For in that dreame of death, when wee awake,
And borne before an euertlasting Iudge,
From whence no passenger euer returnd,
The vndiscovered countrey, at whose sight
The happy smile, and the accuited damn'd.
But for this, the ioyfull hope of this,
Whol'd beare the scornes and flattery of the world,
Scorned by the right rich, the rich curst of the poore?

Hamlet's famous "To be, or not to be" lines, written in Early Modern English by Shakespeare.

Late Modern English (1800-Present)

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.

Varieties of English

From around 1600, the English colonization of North America resulted in the creation of a distinct American variety of English. Some English pronunciations and words "froze" when they reached America. In some ways, American English is more like the English of Shakespeare than modern British English is. Some expressions that the British call "Americanisms" are in fact original British expressions that were preserved in the colonies while lost for a time in Britain (for example *trash* for rubbish, *loan* as a verb instead of lend, and *fall* for autumn; another example, *frame-up*, was re-imported into Britain through Hollywood gangster movies). Spanish also had an influence on American English (and subsequently British English), with words like *canyon*, *ranch*, *stampede* and *vigilante* being examples of Spanish words that entered English through the settlement of the American West. French words (through Louisiana) and West African words (through the slave trade) also influenced American English (and so, to an extent, British English).

Today, American English is particularly influential, due to the USA's dominance of cinema, television, popular music, trade and technology (including the Internet). But there are many other varieties of English around the world, including for example Australian English, New Zealand English, Canadian English, South African English, Indian English and Caribbean

The English language is spoken by 750 million people in the world as either the official language of a nation, a second language, or in a mixture with other languages (such as pidgins and creoles.) English is the (or an) official language in England, Canada, Australia and New Zealand; however, the United States has no official language.

Indo-European language and people

English is classified genetically as a Low West Germanic language of the Indo-European family of languages. The early history of the Germanic languages is based on reconstruction of a Proto-Germanic language that evolved into German, English, Dutch, Afrikaans, Yiddish, and the Scandinavian languages.

In 1786, Sir William Jones discovered that Sanskrit contained many cognates to Greek and Latin. He conjectured a Proto-Indo-European language had existed many years before. Although there is no concrete proof to support this one language had existed, it is believed that many languages spoken in Europe and Western Asia are all derived from a common language. A few languages that are not included in the Indo-European branch of languages include Basque, Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian; of which the last three belong to the Finno-Ugric language family.

Speakers of Proto-Indo-European (PIE) lived in Southwest Russia around 4,000 to 5,000 BCE. They had words for animals such as bear or wolf (as evidenced in the similarity of the words for these animals in the modern I-E languages.) They also had domesticated animals, and used horse-drawn wheeled carts. They drank alcohol made from grain, and not wine, indicating they did not live in a warm climate. They belonged to a patriarchal society where the lineage was determined through males only (because of a lack of words referring to the female's side of the family.) They also made use of a decimal counting system by 10's, and formed words by compounding. This PIE language was also highly inflectional as words had many endings corresponding to cases.

The spread of the language can be attributed to two theories. The I-E people either wanted to conquer their neighbors or look for better farming land. Either way, the language spread to many areas with the advancement of the people. This rapid and vast spread of the I-E people is attributed to their use of horses for transportation

Old English (449 - 1066 CE)

The Old English language (also called Anglo-Saxon) dates back to 449 CE. The Celts had been living in England when the Romans invaded. Although they invaded twice, they did not conquer the Celts until 43 CE and Latin never overtook the Celtic language. The Romans finally left England in 410 CE as the Roman Empire was collapsing, leaving the Celts defenseless. Then the Germanic tribes from the present-day area of Denmark arrived. The four main tribes were the Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Frisians. These tribes set up seven kingdoms called the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy that included: Mercia, Northumbria, Kent, Wessex, Sussex, Essex, and East Anglia. Four dialects were spoken in these kingdoms: West Saxon, Kentish, Mercian and Northumbrian. The Celts moved north to Scotland, west to Ireland and south to France, leaving the main area of Britain.

In 731 CE, Bede wrote the "Ecclesiastical History of the English People" in Latin. It detailed the sophisticated society of the Germanic tribes. They had destroyed the Roman civilization in England and built their own, while dominance shifted among the kingdoms beginning with Kent and Northumbria. They aligned with the Celtic clergy and converted to Christianity. Laws and contracts were written down for a sense of permanence and control. The Tribal Hidage, a list of subjects

who owed tribute to the king, was written during the Mercian period of power.

Alfred the Great was the king of Wessex from 871-899 while Wessex was the dominant kingdom. During his reign, he united the kingdoms together and commissioned the Anglo-Saxon chronicles, a historical record of important events in England that continued 200 years after his death. Alfred also settled a truce with the Vikings who repeatedly invaded the area. The Treaty of Wedmore was signed in 878 CE and this "Danelaw" gave the northeast half of England to the Danes for settlement. However, because the languages were so similar, the Danes quickly assimilated and intermarried into the English society.

Although the Danes brought their own writing system with them, called the Futhorc, it was not used in England. It is commonly referred to as Runes. The Insular Hand was the name of the writing system used in England, and it contained many symbols that are no longer found in Modern English: the aesc, thorn, edh, yogh and wynn, as well the macron for distinguishing long vowels.

Characteristics of the Old English language

The Germanic tribes were exposed to Latin before they invaded England, so the languages they spoke did have some Latin influence. After converting to Christianity, Latin had more influence, as evidenced in words pertaining to the church. Celtic did not have a large impact on English, as only a few place names are of Celtic origin, but Danish (Old Scandinavian) did contribute many vocabulary words.

Nouns could be of three genders: masculine, feminine or neuter; but these were assigned arbitrarily. Numbers could be either singular or plural, and there were four cases: nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive. In all, there were seven groups of declensions for nouns.

The infinitive of verbs ended in -an. In the present tense, all verbs had markers for number and person. The weak past tense added -de, while the strong past tense usually involved a vowel change. Old English also had many more strong verbs than modern English.

Adjectives could be weak or strong. If preceded by a determiner, the weak ending was added to the adjective. If no determiner preceded the adjective, then the strong endings were used. They also agreed in gender, case and number with the nouns they described. The comparative was formed by adding -ra to the adjective, while the superlative had many endings: -ost, -ist, -est, and -m. Eventually the -ost and -m

endings combined to form the word "most" which is still used before adjectives in the superlative today.

Adverbs were formed by adding -e to the adjective, or -lic, the latter which still remains in modern English as -like.

The syntax of Old English was much more flexible than modern English because of the declensions of the nouns. The case endings told the function of the word in the sentence, so word order was not very important. But as the stress began to move to the first syllable of words, the endings were not pronounced as clearly and began to diminish from the language. So in modern English, word order is very important because we no longer have declensions to show case distinctions. Instead we use prepositions. The general word order was **subject - verb - object**, but it did vary in a few instances:

1. When an object is a pronoun, it often precedes the verb.
2. When a sentence begins with an adverb, the subject often follows the verb.
3. The verb often comes at the end of a subordinate clause.

Pronunciation was characterized by a predictable stress pattern on the first syllable. The length of the vowels was phonemic as there were 7 long and 7 short vowels. There were also two front rounded vowels that are no longer used in modern English, [i:] and [ɪ:]. The i-mutation occurred if there was a front vowel in the ending, then the root vowel became fronted. For example, *foṭ* becomes *foṭ+i = fet* (This helps to explain why *feet* is the plural of *foot*.)

Middle English (1066 - 1500 CE)

The period of Middle English begins with the Norman invasion of 1066 CE. King Edward the Confessor had died without heirs, and William, Duke of Normandy, believed that he would become the next king. However, upon learning that Harold was crowned king, William invaded England, killed Harold and crowned himself king during the famous Battle of Hastings. Yet William spoke only French. As a result, the upper class in England began to speak French while the lower classes spoke English.

But by 1250 CE, French began to lose its prestige. King John had lost Normandy to the French in 1204 CE, and after him, King Edward I spoke only English. At this time, many foreigners entered England which made the nobility feel more "English" and so encouraged more use of the English language. The

upper class tried to learn English, but they did still use French words sometimes, which was considered somewhat snobbish. French still maintained its prestige elsewhere, and the upper class did not want to lose it completely. Nevertheless, the Hundred Year's War (1337-1453 CE) intensified hatred of all things French. The Black Death also played a role in increasing English use with the emergence of the middle class. Several of the workers had been killed by the plague, which increased the status of the peasants, who only spoke English. By 1362 CE, the Statute of Pleading (although written in French) declared English as the official spoken language of the courts. By 1385 CE, English was the language of instruction in schools. 1350 to 1400 CE is known as the Period of Great Individual Writers (most famously, Chaucer), but their works included an apology for writing in English.

Although the popularity of French was decreasing, several words (around 10,000) were borrowed into English between 1250 and 1500 CE (though most of these words were Parisian rather than Norman French). Many of the words were related to government (sovereign, empire), law (judge, jury, justice, attorney, felony, larceny), social life (fashion, embroidery, cuisine, appetite) and learning (poet, logic, physician). Furthermore, the legal system retained parts of French word order (the adjective following the noun) in such terms as fee simple, attorney general and accounts payable.

Early Modern English (1500 - 1650/1700 CE)

William Caxton introduced the printing press to England in 1476 and the East Midland dialect became the literary standard of English. Ten thousand words were added to English as writers created new words by using Greek and Latin affixes. Some words, such as devulgate, attemptate and dispraise, are no longer used in English, but several words were also borrowed from other languages as well as from Chaucer's works. In 1582, Richard Mulcaster proposed in his treatise "Elementaire" a compromise on spelling and by 1623, Henry Cockrum published his English dictionary. The [printing press](#) helped to standardize the spelling of English in its modern stages. The printing press led the path for the [laser printer](#) many, many years later in 1969 which lead to Canon, HP and [Brother toner](#).

Characteristics of Early Modern English

Adjectives lost all endings except for in the comparative and superlative forms. The neuter pronoun it was first used as well as who as a relative pronoun. The class distinctions between formal and informal you were decreasing, so that today there is no difference between them. More strong verbs became weak and the third person singular

form became -(e)s instead of -(e)th. There was a more limited use of the progressive and auxiliary verbs than there is now, however. Negatives followed the verb and multiple negatives were still used.

The Great Vowel Shift (1400-1600) changed the pronunciation of all the vowels. The tongue was placed higher in the mouth, and all the verbs moved up. Vowels that were already high ([i] and [u]) added the diphthongs [aj] and [aw] to the vowels of English.

Several consonants were no longer pronounced, but the spelling system was in place before the consonant loss, so they are still written in English today. The consonants lost include:

- Voiceless velar fricative lost in night; pronounced as f in laugh
- [b] in final -mb cluster (dumb, comb)
- [ɸ] between a or o and consonant (half, walk, talk, folk)
- [r] sometimes before s (Worcestershire)
- initial clusters beginning with k and g (knee, knight, gnat)
- [g] in -ing endings (more commonly pronounced [ɪŋ])

Finally, assibilation occurred when the alveolars [s], [d], [t], and [z] preceded the palatal glide [j], producing the palatal consonants: [š], [ǰ], [č], [ž]

Early Grammarians (18th Century)

A proposal for an Academy of the English Language was first brought forth by Jonathan Swift in 1712, but the Parliament voted against it. Nevertheless, several grammarians wrote dictionaries and grammar books in a prescriptive manner - telling people what to do or not to do with the language. Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* was published in 1755 and Robert Lowth's *Introduction to English Grammar* appeared in 1762. Early grammarians felt that language should be logical, therefore, the double negative was considered incorrect (two negatives equal one positive) and should not be used. They also didn't like shortened or redundant words, borrowing words from other languages (except Latin and Greek), split infinitives, or prepositions at the end of the sentence.

A more scientifically minded attitude took hold by the 19th century when the Oxford English Dictionary was proposed in 1859. It was to be a factual account of every word in the English language since 1000 including its main form, pronunciation, spelling variations, part of speech, etymology, meanings in chronological order and illustrative quotations. The project was begun in 1879 under its first editor, James AH Murray. The first edition was published in 1928, with supplements in 1933 and 1972-6. The second edition was published in 1989 and it recognized American and Australian English, as the International Phonetic Alphabet for pronunciation.

Beginnings of Modern English

In England, several changes to English had occurred since 1700. These include a loss of the post-vocalic r (so that the r is only pronounced before a vowel and not after); an increase in the use of the progressive tenses; and a rise in class consciousness about speech (Received Pronunciation.) Since 1900, a very large amount of vocabulary words has been added to English in a relatively short period. The majority of these words are related to science and technology, and use Greek and Latin roots.

American English

Immigrants from Southeastern England began arriving on the North American continent in the early 1600's. By the mid-1800's, 3.5 million immigrants left the British Isles for the United States. The American English language is characterized by archaisms (words that changed meaning in Britain, but remained in the colonies) and innovations in vocabulary (borrowing from the French and Spanish who were also settling in North America). Noah Webster was the most vocal about the need for an American national identity with regards to the American English language. He wrote an American spelling book, *The Blueback Speller*, in 1788 and changed several spellings from British English (colour became color, theatre became theater, etc.) In 1828, he published his famous *American Dictionary of the English Language*.

Dialects in the United States resulted from different waves of immigration of English speakers, contact with other languages, and the slave trade, which had a profound impact on African American English. A dialectal study was done in 1920 and the findings are published in the *Linguistics Atlas of the U.S. and Canada*.

English around the World

Although the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have English as an official language, the United States does not have an official language. This is how it's possible to become a US citizen without speaking English. Canada also has French as an official language, though it is mostly spoken in the province of Quebec. Because many of the English speakers who originally inhabited Canada came from the US, there is little difference in the American and Canadian dialects of English. Similarly, Australian and New Zealand English have few differences, except Australia was originally settled as a penal colony and New Zealand was not. New Zealanders were more attached to the Received Pronunciation of the upper class in England, so their dialect is considered closer to British English.

Cockney (and its Rhyming Slang) is an interesting dialect of English spoken in London's east end. The initial h of words is dropped, glottal stops are used frequently and labiodentals are used in place of interdental. The Rhyming Slang refers to a word by referring to two things, the last of which rhymes with what is being referred to. For

examples, money is "bees and honey," gloves is "turtle doves," suit is "whistle and flute" and trouble is "Barney Rubble." Even more confusing, sometimes the second word (which rhymes with the word being referred to) is omitted, so that money is called just "bees."

British colonialism has spread English all over the world, and it still holds prestige in South Africa, India, and Singapore, among other nations. In South Africa, English became an official language, along with Afrikaans and 9 African languages, in the 1996 constitution. However, only 3% of the country's 30 million people are native English speakers. Twenty percent are descendants of Dutch farmers who speak Afrikaans, and the rest are native Africans. Although the British won the Boer Wars of 1899-1901 against the Dutch farmers (the Boers), Britain still promised the Boers self-government under the Union of South Africa. By 1948, these Afrikaners won state elections and remained in power through the 1990's. Apartheid (which segregated the Afrikaners and Africans) officially ended under Nelson Mandela's reign, and although Afrikaans was the language used more often, the Africans wanted English as the official language. Hence the compromise of 11 official languages.

India became an independent from Britain in 1947, and the English language was supposed to be phased out by 1965. However, today English and Hindi are the official languages. Indian English is characterized by treating mass nouns as count nouns, frequent use of the "isn't it?" tag, use of more compounds, and a different use of prepositions. In Singapore, Chinese, Malay and Indian languages have an impact on the form of English spoken. Everyone is taught English in the school system, but there are a few differences from British English as well. Mass nouns are treated as count nouns, "use to" means usually, and no articles are used before occupations.

Creoles of English can be found on the coast of West Africa, China, and on islands of the Pacific and Caribbean (especially the West Indies.) Originally, these creoles were pidgins so that English-speaking traders could conduct business. Over time, they became the native languages of the children and evolved into creoles.

A Brief History of the English Language

English is a member of the Indo-European family of languages. This broad family includes most of the European languages spoken today. The Indo-European family includes several major branches: Latin and the modern Romance languages (French etc.); the **Germanic languages** (English, German, Swedish etc.); the **Indo-Iranian languages** (Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit

etc.); the **Slavic languages** (Russian, Polish, Czech etc.); the **Baltic languages** of Latvian and Lithuanian; the **Celtic languages** (Welsh, Irish Gaelic etc.); **Greek**.

The influence of the original Indo-European language can be seen today, even though no written record of it exists. The word for *father*, for example, is *vater* in German, *pater* in Latin, and *pitr* in Sanskrit. These words are all cognates, similar words in different languages that share the same root.

Of these branches of the Indo-European family, two are, as far as the study of the development of English is concerned, of paramount importance, the Germanic and the Romance (called that because the Romance languages derive from Latin, the language of ancient Rome). English is a member of the Germanic group of languages. It is believed that this group began as a common language in the Elbe river region about 3,000 years ago. By the second century BC, this Common Germanic language had split into three distinct sub-groups:

- East Germanic was spoken by peoples who migrated back to southeastern Europe. No East Germanic language is spoken today, and the only written East Germanic language that survives is Gothic.
- North Germanic evolved into the modern Scandinavian languages of Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, and Icelandic (but not Finnish, which is related to Hungarian and Estonian and is not an Indo-European language).
- West Germanic is the ancestor of modern German, Dutch, Flemish, Frisian, and English.

Old English (500-1100 AD)

[CLICK HERE TO SEE A MAP OF ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND](#)

West Germanic invaders from Jutland and southern Denmark: the Angles (whose name is the source of the words England and English), Saxons, and Jutes, began to settle in the British Isles in the fifth and sixth centuries AD. They spoke a mutually intelligible language, similar to modern Frisian - the language of the northeastern region of the Netherlands - that is called Old English. Four major dialects of Old English emerged, Northumbrian in the north of England, Mercian in the Midlands, West Saxon in the south and west, and Kentish in the Southeast.

These invaders pushed the original, Celtic-speaking inhabitants out of what is now England into Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, and Ireland, leaving behind a few Celtic words. These Celtic languages survive today in the Gaelic

languages of Scotland and Ireland and in Welsh. Cornish, unfortunately, is, in linguistic terms, now a dead language. (The last native Cornish speaker died in 1777) Also influencing English at this time were the Vikings. Norse invasions and settlement, beginning around 850, brought many North Germanic words into the language, particularly in the north of England. Some examples are *dream*, which had meant 'joy' until the Vikings imparted its current meaning on it from the Scandinavian cognate *draumr*, and *skirt*, which continues to live alongside its native English cognate *shirt*.

The majority of words in modern English come from foreign, not Old English roots. In fact, only about one sixth of the known Old English words have descendants surviving today. But this is deceptive; Old English is much more important than these statistics would indicate. About half of the most commonly used words in modern English have Old English roots. Words like *be*, *water*, and *strong*, for example, derive from Old English roots.

Old English, whose best known surviving example is the poem [Beowulf](#), lasted until about 1100. Shortly after the most important event in the development and history of the English language, the Norman Conquest.

The Norman Conquest and Middle English (1100-1500)

William the Conqueror, the Duke of Normandy, invaded and conquered England and the Anglo-Saxons in 1066 AD. The new overlords spoke a dialect of Old French known as Anglo-Norman. The Normans were also of Germanic stock ("Norman" comes from "Norseman") and Anglo-Norman was a French dialect that had considerable Germanic influences in addition to the basic Latin roots.

Prior to the Norman Conquest, Latin had been only a minor influence on the English language, mainly through vestiges of the Roman occupation and from the conversion of Britain to Christianity in the seventh century (ecclesiastical terms such as *priest*, *vicar*, and *mass* came into the language this way), but now there was a wholesale infusion of Romance (Anglo-Norman) words.

The influence of the Normans can be illustrated by looking at two words, *beef* and *cow*. *Beef*, commonly eaten by the aristocracy, derives from the Anglo-Norman, while the Anglo-Saxon commoners, who tended the cattle, retained the Germanic *cow*. Many legal terms, such as *indict*, *jury*, and *verdict* have Anglo-Norman roots because the Normans ran the courts. This

split, where words commonly used by the aristocracy have Romantic roots and words frequently used by the Anglo-Saxon commoners have Germanic roots, can be seen in many instances.

Sometimes French words replaced Old English words; *crime* replaced *firen* and *uncle* replaced *eam*. Other times, French and Old English components combined to form a new word, as the French *gentle* and the Germanic *man* formed *gentleman*. Other times, two different words with roughly the same meaning survive into modern English. Thus we have the Germanic *doom* and the French *judgment*, or *wish* and *desire*.

It is useful to compare various versions of a familiar text to see the differences between Old, Middle, and Modern English. Take for instance this Old English (c. 1000) sample:

Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum
si þin nama gehalgod tobecume þin rice gewurþe þin willa on eorðan swa
swa on heofonum
urne gedæghwamlican hlaf syle us to dæg
and forgyf us ure gyltas swa swa we forgyfað urum gyltendum
and ne gelæd þu us on costnunge ac alys us of yfele soþlice.

Rendered in Middle English (Wyclif, 1384), the same text is recognizable to the modern eye:

Oure fadir þat art in heuenes halwid be þi name;
þi reume or kyngdom come to be. Be þi wille don in herþe as it is doun in
heuene.
yeue to us today oure eche dayes bred.
And foryeue to us oure dettis þat is oure synnys as we foryeuen to oure
dettouris þat is to men þat han synned in us.
And lede us not into temptacion but delyuere us from euyl.

Finally, in Early Modern English (King James Version, 1611) the same text is completely intelligible:

Our father which art in heauen, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heauen.
Giue us this day our daily bread.
And forgiue us our debts as we forgiue our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliuer us from euill. Amen.

For a lengthier comparison of the three stages in the development of English [click here!](#)

In 1204 AD, King John lost the province of Normandy to the King of France. This began a process where the Norman nobles of England became increasingly estranged from their French cousins. England became the chief concern of the nobility, rather than their estates in France, and consequently the nobility adopted a modified English as their native tongue. About 150 years later, the Black Death (1349-50) killed about one third of the English population. And as a result of this the labouring and merchant classes grew in economic and social importance, and along with them English increased in importance compared to Anglo-Norman.

This mixture of the two languages came to be known as Middle English. The most famous example of Middle English is [Chaucer's Canterbury Tales](#). Unlike Old English, Middle English can be read, albeit with difficulty, by modern English-speaking people.

By 1362, the linguistic division between the nobility and the commoners was largely over. In that year, the Statute of Pleading was adopted, which made English the language of the courts and it began to be used in Parliament.

The Middle English period came to a close around 1500 AD with the rise of Modern English.

Early Modern English (1500-1800)

The next wave of innovation in English came with the Renaissance. The revival of classical scholarship brought many classical Latin and Greek words into the Language. These borrowings were deliberate and many bemoaned the adoption of these "inkhorn" terms, but many survive to this day. Shakespeare's character Holofernes in *Loves Labor Lost* is a satire of an overenthusiastic schoolmaster who is too fond of Latinisms.

Many students having difficulty understanding [Shakespeare](#) would be surprised to learn that he wrote in modern English. But, as can be seen in the earlier example of the Lord's Prayer, Elizabethan English has much more in common with our language today than it does with the language of Chaucer. Many familiar words and phrases were coined or first recorded by Shakespeare, some 2,000 words and countless idioms are his. Newcomers to Shakespeare are often shocked at the number of cliches contained in his plays, until they realize that he coined them and they became cliches afterwards. "One fell swoop," "vanish into thin air," and "flesh and blood" are

all Shakespeare's. Words he bequeathed to the language include "critical," "leapfrog," "majestic," "dwindle," and "pedant."

Two other major factors influenced the language and served to separate Middle and Modern English. The first was the Great Vowel Shift. This was a change in pronunciation that began around 1400. While modern English speakers can read Chaucer with some difficulty, Chaucer's pronunciation would have been completely unintelligible to the modern ear. Shakespeare, on the other hand, would be accented, but understandable. Vowel sounds began to be made further to the front of the mouth and the letter "e" at the end of words became silent. Chaucer's *Lyf* (pronounced "leef") became the modern *life*. In Middle English *name* was pronounced "nam-a," *five* was pronounced "feef," and *down* was pronounced "doon." In linguistic terms, the shift was rather sudden, the major changes occurring within a century. The shift is still not over, however, vowel sounds are still shortening although the change has become considerably more gradual.

The last major factor in the development of Modern English was the advent of the printing press. William Caxton brought the printing press to England in 1476. Books became cheaper and as a result, literacy became more common. Publishing for the masses became a profitable enterprise, and works in English, as opposed to Latin, became more common. Finally, the printing press brought standardization to English. The dialect of London, where most publishing houses were located, became the standard. Spelling and grammar became fixed, and the first English dictionary was published in 1604.

Late-Modern English (1800-Present)

The principal distinction between early- and late-modern English is vocabulary. Pronunciation, grammar, and spelling are largely the same, but Late-Modern English has many more words. These words are the result of two historical factors. The first is the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the technological society. This necessitated new words for things and ideas that had not previously existed. The second was the British Empire. At its height, Britain ruled one quarter of the earth's surface, and English adopted many foreign words and made them its own.

The industrial and scientific revolutions created a need for neologisms to describe the new creations and discoveries. For this, English relied heavily on Latin and Greek. Words like *oxygen*, *protein*, *nuclear*, and *vaccine* did not exist in the classical languages, but they were created from Latin and Greek roots. Such neologisms were not exclusively created from classical roots

though, English roots were used for such terms as *horsepower*, *airplane*, and *typewriter*.

This burst of neologisms continues today, perhaps most visible in the field of electronics and computers. *Byte*, *cyber-*, *bios*, *hard-drive*, and *microchip* are good examples.

Also, the rise of the British Empire and the growth of global trade served not only to introduce English to the world, but to introduce words into English. Hindi, and the other languages of the Indian subcontinent, provided many words, such as *pundit*, *shampoo*, *pajamas*, and *juggernaut*. Virtually every language on Earth has contributed to the development of English, from Finnish (*sauna*) and Japanese (*tycoon*) to the vast contributions of French and Latin.

The British Empire was a maritime empire, and the influence of nautical terms on the English language has been great. Phrases like *three sheets to the wind* have their origins onboard ships.

Finally, the military influence on the language during the latter half of twentieth century was significant. Before the Great War, military service for English-speaking persons was rare; both Britain and the United States maintained small, volunteer militaries. Military slang existed, but with the exception of nautical terms, rarely influenced standard English. During the mid-20th century, however, a large number of British and American men served in the military. And consequently military slang entered the language like never before. *Blockbuster*, *nose dive*, *camouflage*, *radar*, *roadblock*, *spearhead*, and *landing strip* are all military terms that made their way into standard English.

American English and other varieties

Also significant beginning around 1600 AD was the English colonization of North America and the subsequent creation of American English. Some pronunciations and usages "froze" when they reached the American shore. In certain respects, some varieties of American English are closer to the English of Shakespeare than modern Standard English ('English **English**' or as it is often incorrectly termed 'British English') is. Some "Americanisms" are actually originally English **English** expressions that were preserved in the colonies while lost at home (e.g., *fall* as a synonym for autumn, *trash* for rubbish, and *loan* as a verb instead of lend).

The American dialect also served as the route of introduction for many native American words into the English language. Most often, these were place names like *Mississippi*, *Roanoke*, and *Iowa*. Indian-sounding names like *Idaho* were sometimes created that had no native-American roots. But, names for other things besides places were also common. *Raccoon*, *tomato*, *canoe*, *barbecue*, *savanna*, and *hickory* have native American roots, although in many cases the original Indian words were mangled almost beyond recognition.

Spanish has also been great influence on American English. *Mustang*, *canyon*, *ranch*, *stampede*, and *vigilante* are all examples of Spanish words that made their way into English through the settlement of the American West.

A lesser number of words have entered American English from French and West African languages.

Likewise dialects of English have developed in many of the former colonies of the British Empire. There are distinct forms of the English language spoken in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India and many other parts of the world.

Global English

English has now inarguably achieved global status. Whenever we turn on the news to find out what's happening in East Asia, or the Balkans, or Africa, or South America, or practically anywhere, local people are being interviewed and telling us about it in English. To illustrate the point when Pope John Paul II arrived in the Middle East recently to retrace Christ's footsteps and addressed Christians, Muslims and Jews, the pontiff spoke not Latin, not Arabic, not Italian, not Hebrew, not his native Polish. He spoke in English.

Indeed, if one looks at some of the facts about the amazing reach of the English language many would be surprised. English is used in over 90 countries as an official or semi-official language. English is the working language of the Asian trade group ASEAN. It is the de facto working language of 98 percent of international research physicists and research chemists. It is the official language of the European Central Bank, even though the bank is in Frankfurt and neither Britain nor any other predominantly English-speaking country is a member of the European Monetary Union. It is the language in which Indian parents and black parents

in South Africa overwhelmingly wish their children to be educated. It is believed that over one billion people worldwide are currently learning English.

One of the more remarkable aspects of the spread of English around the world has been the extent to which Europeans are adopting it as their internal lingua franca. English is spreading from northern Europe to the south and is now firmly entrenched as a second language in countries such as Sweden, Norway, Netherlands and Denmark. Although not an official language in any of these countries if one visits any of them it would seem that almost everyone there can communicate with ease in English. Indeed, if one switches on a television in Holland one would find as many channels in English (albeit subtitled), as there are in Dutch.

As part of the European Year of Languages, a special survey of European attitudes towards and their use of languages has just published. The report confirms that at the beginning of 2001 English is the most widely known foreign or second language, with 43% of Europeans claiming they speak it in addition to their mother tongue. Sweden now heads the league table of English speakers, with over 89% of the population saying they can speak the language well or very well. However, in contrast, only 36% of Spanish and Portuguese nationals speak English. What's more, English is the language rated as most useful to know, with over 77% of Europeans who do not speak English as their first language, rating it as useful. French rated 38%, German 23% and Spanish 6%

English has without a doubt become the global language.