# The History of the English Language

What we know as the English language today has evolved over thousands of years, influenced by migrating tribes, conquering armies and peaceful trade.

## Out of India

6,000 - 3,000 BC

The beginnings of European languages developed in India and travelled north. These Indo-European languages became distinct as peoples divided across Europe and culminated in the Celtic in ancient Britain.

## PRE-ENGLISH

100 BC

Pre-55 BC, the native language of Britain was Celtic.

**Celtic**

55 BC

Successive Roman invasions conquer much of Britain but there is little Latin impact on the Celtic language. Many Latin words didn't catch on with the agrarian native British.

**Latin**

Around 200 Words entered the language.

ergo, optimus, celeritas, nox, pax, culpa, exter, maximus, fenestra, pro

AD 200

AD 300

AD 400

AD 410

Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Frisians introduce west Germanic which would beome distinct from the Continent.

**Post Proto Germanic**

4 weekdays were named after their gods.

Tuesday Tiw's Day
Wednesday Woden's Day
Thursday Thor's Day
Friday Frigg's Day

Dog, Bee

Words still in use today: candle, wine, wall

The Origin of Old English

1/3 of the modern English language uses everyday Anglo-Saxon words.

earth, night, bake, sleep, baffle, food, loaf, house, sing, haywire

AD 500

## OLD ENGLISH

AD 591

**Latin**

Christian missionaries bring Latin as the language of the new religion.

tower, font, martyr, mass, altar, bishop, school

AD 600

7th Century

Latin speakers named our country, 'Anglia', the Land of the Angles'.

AD 700

AD 787

Repeated Viking invasions soon saw the Norse as the dominant power on the East of England.

Their influence waned as they were repulsed to the North East of England by King Alfred the Great.

**Norse**

egg, muggy, take, reindeer, sky, die, freckle, thrust, give, silver, anger, skirt, smile

AD 800

AD 900

The burgeoning English language began to cement national identity.

2,000 new words introduced

AD 1000

AD 1042

AD 1066

King William of Normandy conquers England. French becomes the language of the law, aristocracy and power.

Religion is served by Latin while the common man speaks Old English in this trilingual land.

**Norman French**

AD 1100

parliament, marriage, judge, justice, libel, slander, larceny, bacon, sir, evidence, accuse

Bilingual Words that survive today

Cow, Sheep, Swine

Beef, Mutton, Pork

Rules and Regulations*

*Regulations was the French derived word for 'Rules' - used in tandem with the English to enable both peoples' comprehension.

AD 1200

## MIDDLE ENGLISH

AD 1300

AD 1362

English replaces French for the first time at the opening of parliament.

AD 1400

**Hundred Years War: 1337-1450**

Tensions between English and French erupted into bloody war that lasted for 116 years. French became the language of the enemy and was no longer *de rigeur*.

AD 1476

**The Renaissance**

William Caxton introduces the first printing press to England. Books are mass produced rather than expensively hand-copied.

Printers opt to use the spellings and grammar on South East dialects.

AD 1500

**William Shakespeare: 1564-1616**

The Bard was responsible for ever 2,000 words and phrases that we use today.

hob-nob, **eyeball**, puppy dog, **eat out of house and home**, lackpot shrift, **green eyed monster**, **flesh and blood**, breaking the ice, anchovy, **besmirch**, dauntless, **dead as a doornail**, flawed

AD 1600

AD 1611

**King James Bible**

Translated from Latin, Hebrew and Greek into English for the first time, the King James Bible made Scripture more accessible to the common man and is responsible for many phrases popular today.

writing on the wall, **labour of love**, heart's desire, **go the extra mile**, salt of the earth, **powers that be**, filthy lucre, strength to strength, turned the world upside down, **ends of the earth**

AD 1650

**British Empire 1583 - 1914**

In this period, the English grew by absorbing words from global travels and empire building.

**Caribbean**: barbecue, cannibal

**India**: cummerbund, bungalow

**Africa**: voodoo, zombie

**Australia**: wallaby, boomerang

In the Americas, the British were to return with European and Native American words.

**Native American**: raccoon, squash

**Dutch**: cookies, coleslaw

**German**: pretzel, dachshund

**Italian**: pasta, radio

AD 1700

AD 1755

**Samuel Johnson's Dictionary**

Nine years in the making, the famous first dictionary of the English language was transcribed by Catherine Macaulay, each and every word.

including the proper spelling

The impossible task for one man, evoking Rabelais, was only impacted decades later with the arrival of the Oxford English Dictionary in 1884.

AD 1800

## MODERN ENGLISH

American capitalist words like breakeven, bottomline, blue chip, white collar, merger and downsizing are adopted.

AD 1900

1972 - present day

From emails to SMS texting and the Internet, typing gained a new boost and new acronyms and words were born.

download LOL
IMHO Firewall
FYI toolbar BTW

AD 2000

The English language now has words taken or derived from over 350 languages.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

The typically American words:

| | |
|---|---|
| Diaper | (Nappy) |
| Candy | (Chocolate) |
| Fall | (Autumn) |
| Faucet | (Tap) |

were actually 'English' words taken to American shores.


Sources:
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