

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTICLES

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## THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The first people in Britain about whose language we have definite knowledge are the Celts. Celtic was, therefore, presumably the first Indo-European language to be spoken in the country we now know as England. Another language, Latin, was spoken for a period of time of about four centuries before the coming of the Anglo-Saxons, but its use by native Britons was probably confined to members of the upper classes.

The Teutonic tribes which settled in Britain after the Romans had left it, were the Jutes, Saxons and Angles. Before crossing over to Britain, the Jutes and the Angles most probably had their home in the Danish peninsula; the Jutes in the northern half (hence the name Jutland) and the Angles in the South. The Saxons were settled to the south and west of the Angles, roughly between the Elbe and the Ems.

First came the Jutes who settled in Kent, then, according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the Saxons who settled in Sussex and Wessex. Finally the Angles who occupied the east coast and then established an Anglian Kingdom north of the Humber.

The Celts called their Teutonic conquerors "Saxons" indiscriminately. But soon the terms "Angli" and "Anglia" were used for the Teutons generally.

The English language of today is the language which has resulted from the fusion of the

dialects spoken by the Jutes, Saxons and Angles. In the development of English, we generally distinguish three main periods. The period from 450 to 1150 is known as Old English. From 1150 to 1500 the language is known as Middle English. The language from 1500 to the present time is called Modern English.

### Questions and Exercises

1. What was the first Indo-European language to be spoken in Britain?
2. What were the Teutonic tribes that settled in Britain after the Romans had left it ?
3. Where did these tribes settle?
4. What are the main periods in the development of English?
5. Find out as much as you can from other sources about the other languages of the Teutonic group.
6. Where did the Jutes, Angles and Saxons come from?

### Saxons and Normans

"What do you call those grunting animals running about on their four legs?" asked Wamba. "Swine, fool, swine", said Gurth, "every fool knows that".

"And swine is good Saxon; but what do you call the animal when it is killed, quartered and hung up by the heels, like a traitor?"

"Pork", answered Gurth.

"I am very glad every fool knows that, too", said Wamba, "and pork, I think, is good Norman-French. And so, when the animal lives, and is in the charge of a Saxon slave, it is called by its Saxon name, but becomes a Norman and is called pork, when it is carried to the tables of the Norman Lords. And I can tell you more: the ox has a Saxon name, while it is under the charge of serfs such as you, but becomes beef, a good French word, when it arrives before the teeth that are destined to eat it. The calf, too, becomes veal in the like manner: it is Saxon when it requires tendance, and it takes a Norman name when it becomes a matter of enjoyment".

"By St. Dunstan", answered Gurth, "you tell sad truths; little is left to us but the air we breathe. The best food is for their tables, our best soldiers die in distant lands fighting for their foreign masters, and few are left here who have either the will or power to protect the unfortunate Saxon".

WALTER SCOTT (Adapted from "Ivanhoe")

### English.

When I arrived in England I thought I knew English. After I'd been here an hour I realized that I did not understand one word. In the first week I picked up a tolerable working knowledge of the language and the next seven years convinced me that I would never know it well. This is sad. My only consolation being that nobody speaks English perfectly. Remember that those five hundred words an average Englishman uses are far from being the whole vocabulary of the language. You may learn another five hundred and another five thousand and yet another fifty thousand and still you may come across a further fifty thousand you have never heard of before.

If you live here long enough you will find out to your great amazement that the adjective nice is not the only adjective the language possesses, in spite of the fact that in the first three years you do not need to learn or use any other adjectives. You can say that the weather is nice, a restaurant is nice, Mr So-and-so is nice, Mrs So-and-so's clothes are nice, you had a nice time, and all this will be very nice.

Then you have to decide on your accent. The easiest way to give the impression of having a good accent or no foreign accent at all is to hold an unlit pipe in your mouth, to mutter between your teeth and finish all your sentences with the question: "isn't it?". People will not understand much, but they are accustomed to that and they will get a most excellent impression.

Do not forget that it is easier to write in English than to speak English, because you can

write without a foreign accent.

GEORGE MIKES

(Abridged from "How to be an Alien")

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## The World of English Language

We all live in a small unique world, that's why we need at least one sole common language. Carl william Brown

The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time. T.S. Eliot

We all speak English, or at least we try!

Because English is so widely spoken, it has often been referred to as a "world language," the lingua franca of the modern era. While English is not an official language in most countries, it is currently the language most often taught as a second language around the world. Some linguists believe that it is no longer the exclusive cultural sign of "native English speakers", but is rather a language that is absorbing aspects of cultures worldwide as it continues to grow. It is, by international treaty, the official language for aerial and maritime communications. It is an official language of the United Nations and many other international organizations, including the International Olympic Committee. Modern English, sometimes described as the first global lingua franca, is also the dominant international language in communications, science, business, aviation, entertainment, radio and diplomacy. Some years ago for instance, a decision of the Dutch government shocked the other European countries: in Dutch universities some courses may be given in English instead of Dutch. In fact, most courses in information technology, medicine, engineering, economics and so on include a lot of English terminology in every other language of the world.

English is the language most often studied as a foreign language in the European Union (by 89% of schoolchildren), followed by French (32%), German (18%), and Spanish (8%). In the EU, a large fraction of the population reports being able to converse to some extent in English. Among non-English speaking countries, a large percentage of the population claimed to be able to converse in English in the Netherlands (87%), Sweden (85%), Denmark (83%), Luxembourg (66%), Finland (60%), Slovenia (56%), Austria (53%), Belgium (52%), and Germany (51%). Norway and Iceland also have a large majority of competent English-speakers. Books, magazines, and newspapers written in English are available in many countries around the world. English is also the most commonly used language in the sciences. In 1997, the Science Citation Index reported that 95% of its articles were written in English, even though only half of them came from authors in English-speaking countries.

English is a West Germanic language that originated in England and is the first language for most people in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and the Anglophone Caribbean. It is used extensively as a second language and as an official language throughout the world, especially in Commonwealth countries and in many international organisations. Historically English originated from the dialects, now called Old English, which were brought to England by Anglo-Saxon settlers, beginning in the 5th century. The language was heavily influenced by the Old Norse language of Viking invaders. The Norman conquest brought a stage called Middle English with heavy borrowing of vocabulary from Norman French and modernization of spelling conventions. Modern English continues to adopt foreign words, especially from Latin and Greek.

The initial reason for its enormous spread beyond the bounds of the British Isles, where it

was originally a native tongue, was the British Empire, and by the late nineteenth century its reach was truly global. It is the dominant language in the United States, whose growing economic and cultural influence and status as a global superpower since World War II have significantly accelerated adoption of English as a language across the planet. Nowadays a working and cultural knowledge of English has become a requirement in a number of fields, occupations and professions such as medicine and as a consequence over a billion people speak English to at least a basic level. All this has slowly led to another fact: the world's lingua franca is now English. It is a particular kind of English, though: it is simpler than the English spoken by native speakers, and its pronunciation is half way between British English, American English, and other forms of spoken English. This kind of English is spoken in international conferences, fairs, trade, international organizations, and so on.

### **They speak English too**

I come from Kano in northern Nigeria. My name is Abubakar Rabat. At home with my family I speak Hausa, one of the main Nigerian languages. The official language in Nigeria is English but there are about 250 other languages. We use English a lot at school. I want to work with computers and English is essential for this.

My name's Lata Desai. I'm from Kanpur in the north of India. My native language is Hindi but I also use English very often. People from other parts of India do not speak Hindi. We have sixteen official languages in India and over one thousand different dialects! But most educated people can speak English.

I come from Montego Bay on the island of Jamaica. The population of Jamaica is an incredible mixture of races, with people from all over Africa, Europe and Asia. We speak a local version of English called Jamaican creole. Sometimes it's very different from standard English.

My hometown Hong Kong was a British colony but it is part of China now. There are two official languages, English and Chinese. In fact, most people in Hong Kong speak Cantonese, a dialect from southern China. I speak Cantonese with my family. Not many people speak English. But English is still important if you want to get a good job.

My name is Teenay Takee and I am an Inuit from Canada. People sometimes call us "Eskimos" but we don't use that name. We speak English but we also have our own language, Inuktitut, and traditions. Now we have our own homeland in northern Canada called Nunavut.

English isn't the only language in Britain, you know. My name's Ellen Rees and I come from Wales. In my town most people speak Welsh as their first language (although everybody can speak English too). We have Welsh newspapers and Welsh radio and television. English people are surprised when they come here on holiday.

My name is Jonah Ihimaera and I am a Maori from Rotorua on the North Island of New Zealand. The Maoris are the original inhabitants of New Zealand and we still have our own customs. We speak English but in our own community we also speak our Maori language.

I am an Aborigine from the Arunta tribe in central Australia. Like most Aborigines, I speak two languages, English and my own tribal language, Arunta. The land and the natural world are very important to Aborigines. We want to preserve our traditions but this is difficult in a modern society like Australia.

I come from the eastern part of South Africa. At home with my parents we speak Swazi, one of the main local African languages. But at school I use English. I like watching films and TV in English. White people in South Africa speak English or Afrikaans. Most black

people can speak at least a little English.

### **A brief chronology of English**

BC 55 Roman invasion of Britain by Julius Caesar. Local inhabitants speak Celtic

BC 43 Roman invasion and occupation. Beginning of Roman rule of Britain.

436 Roman withdrawal from Britain complete.

449 Settlement of Britain by Germanic invaders begins

450-480 Earliest known Old English inscriptions. Old English

1066 William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, invades and conquers England.

c1150 Earliest surviving manuscripts in Middle English. Middle English

1348 English replaces Latin as the language of instruction in most schools.

1362 English replaces French as the language of law. English is used in Parliament for the first time.

c1388 Chaucer starts writing The Canterbury Tales.

c1400 The Great Vowel Shift begins.

1476 William Caxton establishes the first English printing press. Early Modern English

1564 Shakespeare is born.

1604 Table Alphabeticall, the first English dictionary, is published.

1607 The first permanent English settlement in the New World (Jamestown) is established.

1616 Shakespeare dies.

1623 Shakespeare's First Folio is published

1702 The first daily English-language newspaper, The Daily Courant, is published in London.

1755 Samuel Johnson publishes his English dictionary.

1776 Thomas Jefferson writes the American Declaration of Independence.

1782 Britain abandons its American colonies.

1828 Webster publishes his American English dictionary. Late Modern English

1922 The British Broadcasting Corporation is founded.

1928 The Oxford English Dictionary is published.

### **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.

#### **Old English (450-1100 AD)**

Part of Beowulf, a poem written in 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.

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

An example of Middle English by Chaucer.

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.

### Modern English

Early Modern English (1500-1800)

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

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.

### 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 English.

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## **The Influence of Latin on Old English**

Latin (L) influenced the development of Old English (OE) more than any other non-West Germanic language with which OE came into contact. Most scholars divide the influence of L chronologically into three time periods. The first time period concerns such influence

as occurred on the continent prior to the arrival of Anglo-Saxons in England and which arose from contacts between West-Germanic speaking peoples and L speakers. The second period of influence spans from the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in England up to their Christianization ca. 600/650. The last period of influence spans from the time of Christianization up to the arrival of the Normans in 1066.

The most readily apparent influence that L had on OE concerns the use of the L alphabet. Prior to the Christianization of England, what little writing there was, was written with runic letters. Collectively these letters comprised the futhorc alphabet (called so after its first six letters). Through the influence of Irish insular script, OE scribes adopted the L alphabet. They did so with only slight modification and the retention of certain runic letters. Modifications included the use of L <d> with a line through it, <ð> ("eth"), to represent both /q / and /ð/. Somewhat later, they also used the rune thorn, <þ>, to represent these two phonemes. Finally, they incorporated the rune wynn, < >, to represent /w/.

It is more difficult to determine L influence on OE syntax. Naturally, our knowledge of OE syntax is hindered by the general paucity of extant OE texts. Furthermore, many of the surviving OE texts are translations of L texts, and even when they are not, many nonetheless reflect a clear dependence on L models. Consequently, it is difficult to account for the syntactical irregularities of OE texts with any certainty. Such irregularities could represent the influence of L or – just as likely – an otherwise poorly evidenced aspect of OE syntax. Nonetheless, scholars agree that certain constructions – whether native to OE or not – likely did find wider distribution in OE through the influence of L than would otherwise have occurred. Such was likely the case, for example, with the OE "dative absolute" construction as modeled on the L "ablative absolute." While this construction appears rarely in the conservative prose of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, it is ubiquitous in the highly Latinate translation of Bede's Ecclesiastical History.

Not surprisingly, L held the most pervasive influence on OE in the area of vocabulary. Moreover, this sphere of influence provides the clearest index of the changing relationship between OE and L speakers. In total approximately 450 OE words, mostly nouns, were borrowed from L (Baugh, 106). Around 170 of these entered the OE lexicon during the continental period (Hogg, 302; Williams, 57). These words pertain mostly to plants, household items, clothing and building materials. As such, they represent the influence of Vulgar (i.e. spoken) L rather than Classical (i.e. literate) L. It is uncertain how many words date from the second period of L influence. In general though, scholars maintain that there are slightly fewer borrowings dating from this period. With the exception of a comparatively larger number of words having to do with religion and learning, borrowings from this period pertain to the same subject matter as those of the first period (Hogg, 302-3). In strong contrast with the two preceding periods, the third period shows a marked increase in words concerning religion and learning. The influx of such words clearly reflects the influence of the literate, CL culture associated with the Church following the Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons. In addition to direct borrowings, L also influenced the OE lexicon by occasioning the formation of semantic loans, loan translations (or calques) and loan creations. Consider, for example, the semantic loan OE *cniht* for L *discipulus*, in which native OE *cniht*, "boy" or "servant," assumes the additional sense of L *discipulus*, "disciple." Such translations are abundant in the OE lexicon. Equally prevalent are loan translations, in which a L compound word is translated using morphologically equivalent native elements: e.g. OE *foreberan* < L *praeferre*. Loan creations are also numerous. Like loan translations, loan creations translate the L word using native elements but with greater morphological freedom: e.g. OE *restedæg* for L *sabbatum*.

The overall abundance of semantic loans, loan translations and loan creations suggests a final and more general truth concerning the influence of L on OE. Despite the relatively extensive influence of L on OE, OE clearly shows a strong tendency to rely on native resources. That is to say, given the linguistic conditions of OE period, one would expect L to have exerted a far greater influence than in fact our knowledge of OE suggests.

The Influence of Latin on Old English by Edward Moore

For further reading

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