

Origin and Evolution of the English Language

By Joyce Arthur

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English – the global “lingua franca”

- English is mainly a mix of Old High German, Old Norse, and Anglo-Norman (with possible Celtic influences)
- English has largest vocabulary of any language, with over 615,000 entries in OED
- English is only language with a thesaurus of synonyms
- Average active vocabulary of an English speaker is about 20,000 words
- Only 1,000 common words found in 89% of everyday writing
- 11% of the English language is just the letter E
- 43 words account for half of all words in common use.
- A dozen words account for at least 25% of all words:
 - and, be, have, that, it, in, of, the, a, to, will, I, you

Language Speakers

3

L1 = First language

L2 = Second language

Language	L1 speakers	L2 speakers	Total
1. English	379 million	753 million	1.13 billion
2. Mandarin	918	199	1.12 billion
3. Hindi	341	274	615 million
4. Spanish	460	74	534
5. Arabic	290	132	422
6. French	77	208	280
7. Bengali	228	37	266
8. Russian	154	104	258
9. Portuguese	221	13	234
10. French	76	153	229
11. Indonesian	43	155	199
12. Urdu	69	102	171
12. German	76	56	132
13. Japanese	128	1	129
14. Swahili	16	82	98
15. Marathi	83	12	95

Origin of English

- English is one of about a dozen similar languages that began as a single language, known as **Proto-Germanic**
- It developed in southern Scandinavia, original home of the Germanic tribes, who later expanded into continental Europe
- Closest relative to English is Frisian, a Dutch variant
- English absorbed large numbers of words from Scandinavian, French, and Latin, and later other languages.

Brittanic History

- Celts lived throughout Europe (from around 400 BC), but were marginalized to Ireland, Britain, and Brittany by time of Roman conquest in 43 AD (which lasted to about 200 AD).
- Saxons, Angles, Jutes, and Frisians began arriving in British Isles in 449 AD from what is now Denmark, North Germany, and Friesland. They spoke Germanic languages that came to be known as Old English or Anglo-Saxon.
- Anglo-Saxons were dominant in most of England and southern Scotland.
- Cornwall, Ireland, Wales and northern Scotland remained largely Celtic-speaking.
- Danish and Norwegian Vikings invaded in 787, and again in 991, eventually controlling much of Britain. They spoke Old Norse, a close relative of Old English. (Danish dynasty ends in 1042.)

Brittanic History (2)

- Norman conquest of 1066 occupied Britain, South Wales, and Ireland.
- Normans came from Normandy in northern France – they were a mix of local French people and Vikings from Norway (who arrived 9th century).
- Normans spoke a French dialect. For next 300 years, French is the language of government, the arts, and learning in Britton.
- 100 years' war with France (1337-1453) ended with defeat of French.
- Anglo-Saxon language gradually merged with Norman French to become "Middle English".
- This evolved into modern English. About 30% of English words come from French, mostly from the Normans.

Spoken vs. written English

- Written language is more formal and slower to change.
- Spoken language constantly evolves – written language catches up later.
- It's impossible to keep living languages “pure.”
- Old English had gendered nouns like other Germanic languages.
- Spoken language tends to become simplified – elites spoke more “purely” than peasants, who were mostly illiterate.
- Introduction of formal French into England at Norman conquest (1066) meant end of writing in English.
- When written English came back over 12th / 13th century, it was “Middle English” and had lost a vast amount of grammar.
 - The loss of gendered nouns meant the loss of gendered adjectives and adverbs.
 - Many words that started as nouns became verbs in English with **no spelling or ending changes** – e.g., view, silence, rule, outlaw, worship, ban, ship, drink, fight, fire, sleep, copy. Modern examples: impact, fax, friend.

Celtic origins of “do” and “ing”

- ▶ Meaningless “do” (or “dummy do”) is used only in English:
 - ▶ How **do** you do?
 - ▶ **Don’t** do that.
 - ▶ **Did** you do this?
- ▶ English is the only Germanic language to use a verb-noun progressive (“I am singing”) as the primary way to express present tense.
- ▶ Both conventions occur only in Celtic languages:
 - ▶ Goidelic branch: Scottish Gaelic, Irish Gaelic, *Manx*
 - ▶ Brythonic branch: Welsh, Breton, *Cornish*, *Gaulish*

Language Similarities: “Do you like apples?”

► Frisian	Fynsto fan appels?	Like you of apples?
► Dutch	Hou je van appels?	Like you from apples?
► Afrikaans	Hou jy van appels?	Like you from apples?
► German	Magst du Äpfel?	Like you apples?
► Norwegian	Liker du epler?	Like you apples?
► Swedish	Gillar du äpplen?	Like you apples?
► Danish	Kan du lide æbler?	Can you like apples?
► Icelandic	Ert þú hrifin af eplum?	Are you fond of apples?
► Scottish Gaelic	An toil leat ùbhlan?	The will with you apples?
► Irish Gaelic	An maith leat úlla?	The good with you apples?
► Welsh	Dych chi'n hoffi afalau?	Are [do] you like apples?
► Cornish	Yw da genes avalow?	Is [do] like you apples?
► Cornish	A wodhes'ta kewsel Kernewek? Do you speak Cornish?	

Language Similarities:

“We are going to school”

➤ Frisian	Wy geane nei skoalle	We go to school
➤ Dutch	We gaan naar school	We go to school
➤ Afrikaans	Ons gaan skool toe	We go school to
➤ German	Wir gehen zur Schule	We go to school
➤ Norwegian	Vi skal på skolen	We go to school
➤ Swedish	Vi går till skolan	We go to school
➤ Danish	Vi går i skole	We go to school
➤ Icelandic	Við förum í skólann	We go to school
➤ Welsh	Rydyn ni'n mynd i'r ysgol	We go to the school
➤ Scottish Gaelic	Tha sinn a 'dol don sgoil	We are going to school
➤ Irish Gaelic	Táimid ag dul ar scoil	We are going to school
➤ Cornish	Thera ve 'cones	I am working

Ye Olde English

➔ Beowulf was written in Old English about 1100 AD

Hwæt. We Gardena in geardagum,
 þeodcyninga, þrym gefrunon,
 hu ða æpelingas ellen fremedon.
 Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,
 monegum mægþum, meodosetla ofteah,
 egsode eorlas. Syððan ærest wearð
 feascraft funden, he þæs frofre gebad,
 weox under wolcnum, weorðmyndum þah,
 oðþæt him æghwylc þara ymbsittendra
 ofer hronrade hyran scolde,
 gomban gyldan. þæt wæs god cyning.

Listen: You have heard of the
 Danish Kings, in the old days
 and how they were great warriors.
 Shield, the son of Sheaf,
 took many an enemy's chair,
 terrified many a warrior.
 After he was found an orphan,
 he prospered under the sky
 until people everywhere
 listened when he spoke.
 He was a good king!

Middle English

- Geoffrey Chaucer wrote “Canterbury Tales” between 1387 and 1400

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to
the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete
breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge
sonne

When April with its sweet-smelling showers
Has pierced the drought of March to
the root,
And bathed every vein in such liquid
By which power the flower is created;
When the West Wind also with its sweet
breath,
In every wood and field has breathed life into
The tender new leaves, and the young sun

Early Modern English (1500-1800)

- Towards the end of Middle English, a sudden and distinct change in pronunciation started – the “Great Vowel Shift”.
- Vowels were being pronounced shorter and shorter.
- From the 16th century, the British were in contact with many peoples from around the world.
- Then the Renaissance introduced many new words and phrases.
- The invention of printing led to a common language in print, and brought standardization to English spelling and grammar.
- In 1604, the first English dictionary was published.

Shakespeare and Modern English

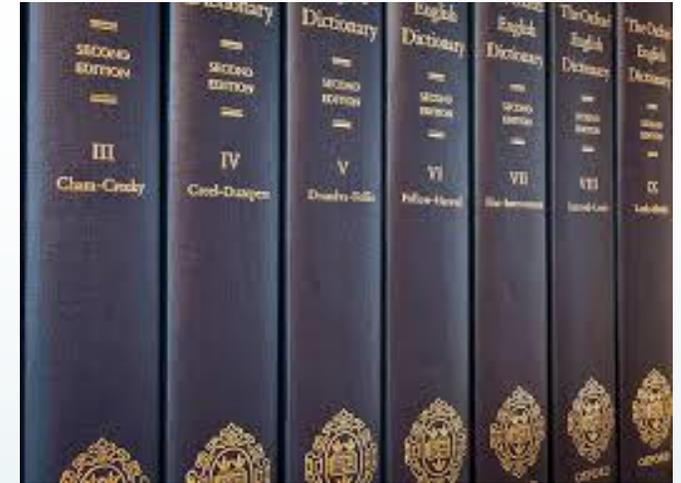
- ▶ Shakespeare coined over 2,000 English words and countless phrases:
 - ▶ Barefaced, critical, leapfrog, monumental, castigate, majestic, obscene, frugal, radiance, dwindle, countless, submerged, excellent, fretful, gust, hint, hurry, lovely, summit, homicide
- ▶ One fell swoop
- ▶ To be in a pickle
- ▶ Budge an inch
- ▶ The sound and the fury
- ▶ Flesh and blood
- ▶ Tower of strength
- ▶ In my mind's eye
- ▶ Vanish into thin air
- ▶ Play fast and loose
- ▶ Cold comfort
- ▶ Foul play
- ▶ Breathing one's last

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 main factors:
 - ▶ Industrial Revolution and technology created a need for new words
 - ▶ British Empire at its height covered one quarter of the earth's surface, and the English language adopted foreign words from many countries.

Dictionaries

- **English has the best dictionaries in the world.**
- 1604: A table Alphabeticall of Hard Words, by Robert Cawdrey (3,000 words)
- 1721: Universal Etymological Dictionary, by Nathaniel Bailey
- 1755: Dictionary of the English Language, by Samuel Johnson (43,000 words)
- 1806: Compendious Dictionary of the English Language, by Noah Webster
- 1884: The New English Dictionary on Historical Principles (first of 12 volumes of what eventually became OED)
- 1933: Oxford English Dictionary, by James Augustus Henry Murray



Simplified English Grammar

- ▶ Pronouns are largely uninflected, except that personal pronouns still have three cases:
 - ▶ Subjective: I, you, he, she, it, we, they, who
 - ▶ Objective: me, you, him, her, it, us, them, whom
 - ▶ Possessive: my / mine; your / yours; his / her / hers; its; our / ours; their / theirs; whose
- ▶ Far fewer case forms than other languages:
 - ▶ Possessives: English adds 's to end
 - ▶ Plurals: English adds s to end of most (only 3 survivors of German style: children, brethren, oxen)
 - ▶ Verbs have 4-6 forms: ride, rides, rode, riding, ridden (German has 16 for same word)
 - ▶ Adjectives never change. Only known exception is blonde / blond

Simplified Grammar / Deceptive Complexity

- Mercifully free of gendered nouns
- Minimized use of articles (the, a/an)
 - It's time to go to bed
(most other languages need to say: "It's the time to go to the bed")
 - Life is short / Between heaven and earth
- More sounds than almost any other language – 44 to 52 sounds – vowels, consonants, diphthongs (two vowels together)
- Deceptive complexity – many common words with multiple meanings and usages:
 - What, right, sit, place, fine, like, line, round, make, get

Origins of “th” sound

- Very rare in the world
- Occurs in Welsh, Icelandic, Greek, Arabic, and Albanian, and no other languages.
- It goes back to Proto-Germanic, but other languages have lost it.
- Pronouns “they, them, their” came from Scandinavia
- The word “their” is the same in English and Scottish Gaelic.

Pronunciation

► There's nothing certain about English pronunciation.

- heard - beard
- road – broad
- five – give
- fillet – skillet
- early – dearly
- beau – beauty
- steak – streak
- ache – mustache

- low – how
- doll – droll
- scour – four
- four – tour
- grieve – sieve
- paid – said
- break – speak
- ginger – finger

► Words pronounced differently if noun or verb:

- Reject, project, defect, rebel, record, convert, produce
- Noun vs adjective/adverb: minute, moment

Opposite meanings

- Some English words have two **opposing** meanings. These are called contronyms:
 - Sanction – official permission or prohibition
 - Cleave – to cut in half or stick together
 - Sanguine – hotheaded or calm
 - Fast – stuck firmly or moving quickly
 - Bolt – to secure a door or run away
 - Ravish – to rape or to enrapture
 - Trying – doing your best or being annoying
 - Wind up – to finish something or start something (a watch)
 - Quinquennial – lasts for 5 years or happens once in 5 years

Fossil words

- **Neck** used to mean a piece of land, preserved in “neck of the woods”
- **Tell** used to mean count, preserved in “bank teller”
- **Prove** used to mean test, preserved in “proving ground”
- Other fossil words (in italics):
 - Short *shrift* *Hem and haw*
 - *Rank and file* *Raring to go*
 - Not a *whit* *Out of kilter*
 - *Newfangled* *At bay*
 - *Spick-and-span* *To and fro*
 - *Kith and kin*

Other English eccentricities

- ▶ The longest English word has 45 letters:
“pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanokoniosis”
- ▶ Nine different ways to pronounce ‘ough’ in English. This sentence contains all 9:
 - ▶ “A rough-coated, dough-faced, thoughtful ploughman strode through the streets of Scarborough; after falling into a slough, he coughed and hiccoughed.”
- ▶ The toughest tongue-twister in English:
The sixth sick sheik’s sixth sheep’s sick.

Universal English words

- Airport
- Passport
- Hotel
- Taxi
- Telephone
- Bar
- Soda
- Cigarette
- Sport
- Golf
- Tennis
- Stop
- O.K.
- Weekend
- Camping
- Jeans
- No problem
- Sex appeal
- Knowhow
- Internet



In honour of
those trying to
learn English.

Thank you!