

History of English Language

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Abstract: *English is a West Germanic language that originated from Anglo-Frisian languages brought to Britain in the mid 5th to 7th centuries AD by Anglo-Saxon migrants from what is now northwest Germany, southern Denmark and the Netherlands. The Anglo-Saxons settled in the British Isles from the mid-5th century and came to dominate the bulk of southern Great Britain. Their language originated as a group of Anglo-Frisian languages which were spoken by the settlers in England and southern and eastern Scotland in the early Middle Ages, displacing the Celtic languages (and, possibly, British Latin) that had previously been dominant. Old English reflected the varied origins of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms established in different parts of Britain. The Late West Saxon dialect eventually became dominant. A significant subsequent influence on the shaping of Old English came from contact with the North Germanic languages spoken by the Scandinavian Vikings who conquered and colonized parts of Britain during the 8th and 9th centuries, which led to much lexical borrowing and grammatical simplification. The Anglian dialects had a greater influence on Middle English.*

Keywords: *lexical borrowing, Celtic languages, upper classes.*

After the Norman conquest in 1066, Old English was replaced, for a time, by Anglo-Norman (also known as Anglo-Norman French) as the language of the upper classes. This is regarded as marking the end of the Old English or Anglo-Saxon era, as during this period the English language was heavily influenced by Anglo-Norman, developing into a phase known now as Middle English. The conquering Normans spoke a Romance langue d'oïl called Old Norman, which in Britain developed into Anglo-Norman. Many Norman and French loanwords entered the local language in this period, especially in vocabulary related to the church, the court system and the government. As Normans are descendants of Vikings who invaded France, Norman French was influenced by Old Norse, and many Norse loanwords in English came directly from French. Middle English was spoken to the late 15th century. The system of orthography that was established during the Middle English period is largely still in use today. Later changes in pronunciation, however, combined with the adoption of various foreign spellings, mean that the spelling of modern English words appears highly irregular.

Early Modern English – the language used by William Shakespeare – is dated from around 1500. It incorporated many Renaissance-era loans from Latin and Ancient Greek, as well as borrowings from other European languages, including French, German and Dutch. Significant pronunciation changes in this period included the ongoing Great Vowel Shift, which affected the qualities of most long vowels. Modern English proper, similar in most respects to that spoken today, was in place by the late 17th century.



English as we know it today came to be exported to other parts of the world through British colonisation, and is now the dominant language in Britain and Ireland, the United States and Canada, Australia, New Zealand and many smaller former colonies, as well as being widely spoken in India, parts of Africa, and elsewhere. Partially due to influence of the United States and its globalized efforts of commerce and technology, English took on the status of a global lingua franca in the second half of the 20th century. This is especially true in Europe, where English has largely taken over the former roles of French and (much earlier) Latin as a common language used to conduct business and diplomacy, share scientific and technological information, and otherwise communicate across national boundaries. The efforts of English-speaking Christian missionaries have resulted in English becoming a second language for many other groups.

Global variation among different English dialects and accents remains significant today. Scots, a form of English traditionally spoken in parts of Scotland and the north of Ireland, is sometimes treated as a separate language.

The Germanic settlers in the British Isles initially spoke a number of different dialects, which would develop into a language that came to be called Anglo-Saxon. It displaced the indigenous Brittonic Celtic (and the Latin of the former Roman rulers) in parts of the areas of Britain that later formed the Kingdom of England, while Celtic languages remained in most of Scotland, Wales and Cornwall, and many compound Celtic-Germanic place names survive, hinting at early language mixing. Old English continued to exhibit local variation, the remnants of which continue to be found in dialects of Modern English. The four main dialects were Mercian, Northumbrian, Kentish and West Saxon; the last of these formed the basis for the literary standard of the later Old English period, although the dominant forms of Middle and Modern English would develop mainly from Mercian.

Old English was first written using a runic script called the futhorc, but this was replaced by a version of the Latin alphabet introduced by Irish missionaries in the 8th century. Most literary output was in either the Early West Saxon of Alfred the Great's time, or the Late West Saxon (regarded as the "classical" form of Old English) of the Winchester school inspired by Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester and followed by such writers as the prolific Ælfric of Eynsham ("the Grammarian"). The most famous surviving work from the Old English period is the epic poem Beowulf, composed by an unknown poet.

The introduction of Christianity from around the year 600 encouraged the addition of over 400 Latin loan words into Old English, such as the predecessors of the modern priest, paper, and school, and a smaller number of Greek loan words. The speech of eastern and northern parts of England was also subject to strong Old Norse influence due to Scandinavian rule and settlement beginning in the 9th century (see below).

Most native English speakers today find Old English unintelligible, even though about half of the most commonly used words in Modern English have Old English roots. The grammar of Old English was much more inflected than modern English, combined with freer word order, and was

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grammatically quite similar in some respects to modern German. The language had demonstrative pronouns (equivalent to this and that) but did not have the definite article the. The Old English period is considered to have evolved into the Middle English period some time after the Norman conquest of 1066, when the language came to be influenced significantly by the new ruling class's language, Old Norman.

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