***A History of the English Language***

***Past Changes Precipitate Worldwide Popularity***

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The history of the English language is of significance because English is spoken more frequently than any other language except Chinese, according to the International Encyclopedia of Linguistics (410). A Germanic language, English is spoken by an estimated 1,500,000,000 people, and that number is ever increasing, according to An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Language and Languages (121).

English is the chief language of world publishing, science and technology, conferencing, and computer storage as well as the language of international air traffic control (121). English is also used for purposes of international communications, and international politics, business communications, and academic communities (122).

The history of English can be traced to the colonization of people from a family of languages which spread throughout Europe and southern Asia in the fourth millennium BC, (185). It is thought that a seminomadic population living in the steppe region to the north of the Black Sea moved west to Europe and east to Iran and India, spreading their culture and languages (186). According to The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language, the European languages and Sanskrit, the oldest language of the Indian sub-continent, were tied to a common source. When a systematic resemblance was discovered in both roots and verbs and in grammar forms, by comparing similar features of the European languages and Sanskrit, a common source language was reconstructed named Proto-Indo-European (298).

The Proto-Indo-European language was more complex than English today. According to The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language, It is possible to reconstruct three genders (masculine, feminine, and neuter) and up to eight cases (nominative, vocative, accusative, genitive, dative, ablative, locative, instrumental). Adjectives agreed in case, number, and gender with the noun. The verb system was also rich in inflections, used for aspect, mood, tense, voice, person, and number. Different grammatical forms of a word were often related by the feature of ablaut, or vowel graduation: the root vowel would change systematically to express such differences as singular and plural or past and present tense, as is still the case in English foot/feet or take/took (Crystal 299).

The Proto-Indo-European language is thought to have been spoken before 3,000 BC, and to have split up into different languages during the following millennium (298). The languages families include Celtic, Germanic, Italic, Indo-Iranian, Tocharian, Armenian, Anatolian, Albanian, Greek, Balto-Slavic, and Slavic languages. Yiddish, German, Afrikaans, Dutch, Flemish, Frisian, and English make up the West Germanic subgroup of the Germanic Branch (Crystal 186).

Scholars renamed the language group the Indo-European family after 3,000 BC (298). Theorists suggest that the horse was a major element of the Proto-Indo-European and the Indo-European family of languages. They conjecture that the culture was spread by warriors who conquered from horse-drawn chariots. Others discount this theory, according the Dictionary of Languages (273). The Indo-European languages have been marked by a succession of changes affecting different languages. One change of note includes the centum/satem split. K followed by a front vowel became s or sh in Indo-Aryan (Sanskrit sata), Iranian (Persian sad), Slavonic (Russian sto), Baltic (Lithuanian simtas), Albanian (qind, pronounced chind) and Armenian. It remained k in Celtic (Welsh cant), Italic, Tocharian (kant), Greek (hetaton) and Germanic (with a subsequent move to h, English hundred).

A sound shift in consonants occurred that differentiated the Proto-Germanic languages from other Indo-European languages. It included several consonants that were changed from the first example to the second example in the following consonants: p>f, t>0, k>x, b>p, d>t, g>k, bh>b, dh>d, and gh>h. The sound shift was named Grimms Law, after the man who described it, according to Contemporary Linguistics (332).

The Proto-Indo-European, the Indo-European, and specifically the Germanic language, of which English is a derivative, influenced the early history of the English Language. The early history of the English language began in Britain and with several groups of people. At first people migrated to the placed now called England. Several invading groups joined the original settlers of England, bringing with them their language and culture. English became a mixture of languages that adapted to the circumstances and the needs of the people. England eventually commanded an empire, thus, spreading the language around the world. When the empire, diminished the Americas continued to spread the English language because of their political power and wealth. The history of the English language is fascinating and follows as events and language changes are pointed out.

The Celts were the first Indo-European people to spread across Europe, according The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language (304). They emerged from south central Europe and spread throughout most of Europe, reaching the Black Sea and Asia Minor. They migrated to south-west Spain, central Italy, and throughout Britain in a series of wave-like migrations. Their culture was named after a Swiss archaeological site called La Tene.

The first group of Celts went to Ireland in the 4th century and later reached Scotland and the Isle of Man. The second group went into southern England and Wales, and later to Brittany, producing a type of Celtic know as British.

During the greatest days of the Roman Empire, their law ruled all men from Britain to Egypt, from Spain to the Black Sea, according to A History of Knowledge, (67). The Romans had a fierce respect and love of the law. Everywhere the Romans governed, they took their laws and administered them over the peoples they ruled. In fact, Roman law continues to this day to be an influence upon almost all legal systems in the Western world. The Romans adopted the Greek alphabet, Greek ideas, images and world views. They copied the Macedonian order of battle and Spartan steel weapons and armor. They conquered everywhere they went, building roads, establishing cities, trading, and sharing their culture. The Romans build a transportation network with hundreds of miles of roadway. The roads the Romans built still exist today, after twenty centuries of continuous use.

Britain was acquired as a province of the Roman Empire during the century after 14 AD, following the death of Augustus. Words from Latin and Greek languages were adopted into the language. The Greek alphabet, with a few minor changes, is used in the English language today (25). Eventually, the Romans also brought Christianity to Britain. English became a distinct tongue about 449 AD when Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, who spoke Germanic dialects, arrived in Celtic-speaking Britain. Groups of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes came to aid the Romanized Britons who were besieged by Picts and Scots after the Roman military withdrew in 410 AD (Bright 410). English owes its origin to the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes who crossed the sea and settled in Britain, according to the Dictionary of Languages, (166). The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms covered most of what is now England by around 600 AD.

The West Saxons were the most powerful of the new kingdoms, and the only one able to withstand the Viking invasion in the 9th century AD. It was also in Wessex or the West Saxon kingdom that a written language first flourished. The International Encyclopedia of Linguistics divides the history of English into three periods: Old English, Anglo-Saxon from 700 to 1100 AD, Middle English from 1100 to 1500 AD, and Modern English or New English from 1500 to the present (410).

Old English (OE) was a highly inflected language. There were suffixes on nouns, verbs, adjectives, and demonstratives. It had an elaborate system of personal interrogative and relative pronouns. The four dialects during the Old English period were Kentish in the southeast, West Saxon in the south and southwest, Mercian in the Midlands, and Northumbrian above the Humber River. West Saxon was the written standard during the reign of Alfred the Great from 871 to 899 AD.

Old English morphology included noun forms of singulars and plurals, with five cases, and three genders. Old English personal pronouns have been retained, and have transferred into New English, more of their morphological variations than any other form class.

With the influx of the Christian religion at the end of the 6th century, some Latin words were added. About 2,000 Danish words and phrases were also added to Old English. At that time, the combining of native elements in prefixing, suffixing, and compounding was the most characteristic way of expanding the word stock. (Bright, 412)

Britain was invaded again during the Viking age of about 750 to 1050. This invasion was mostly by Danes who then settled in central and southern England. Throughout Britain, most of the people spoke Old English and few words from the Celtic influence remained. Middle English began with the 1066 Norman Conquest. French-speaking Normans carried out government and educational duties. The Norman invasion caused a bilingual environment with the middle class speaking both French and English. It brought approximately 10,000 Norman French words into Middle English. The Normans exerted a great influence in food, fashion, education, religion, government, law, and the military.

Social and linguistic upheaval changed the language climate in 1215 when King John of England was forced to acknowledge the Magna Carta. According to The Heritage of World Civilizations, this monumental document was a victory of feudal over monarchical power in the sense that it secured the rights of many the nobility, the clergy and the townspeople over the autocratic king; it restored the internal balance of power that had been the English political experience since the Norman conquest. Now the English people could be represented at the highest levels of government. This eventually brought English back into use as the countrys language (446-447).

Modern English developed when Caxton established his printing press at Westminister in 1476. New English is a derivative of the dialect of medieval London. It is in the same dialect used by Cha cer and Chancery. During this time Johannes Gutenberg, a German printer invented type molds for casting individual letters. His first book using movable type was printed about 1450 and was printed on rag paper. (The Chinese government is credited with the discovery of paper in 105 AD, however, Arabs also discovered how to make paper.) Gutenbergs invention made movable type practical because he could produce any quantity of letters and words and place the timeype in a frame. He used rag paper in his printings. His most famous printing is the Gutenberg Bible (Van Doren 154).

According to the International Encyclopedia of Linguistics, all vowels were systematically raised, and the highest were dipthongized between 1400 and 1564. Also, there were 333 strong verbs in Old English. Half of the verbs are still used, although, only 68 are inflected as strong verbs (414). The most important phonological event in modern times is the so-called Great Vowel Shift. It began in late middle English and continued until the eighteenth century. The long vowels of Middle English came to be pronounced in a higher position, while the highest vowels became diphthongs, according to The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics (1125).

With the approach of the 18th century, English became an analytical language. Its rich inflectional system weakened, causing a great increase in the use of prepositional phrases, in new phrasal prepositions (e.g. in spite of, with regard to, on the basis of), and in periphrastic verb construction. For example, did say is the periphrastic past tense of say, and said is the inflected past tense of say. During this period, there was a reduction of inflectional distinctions (Asher 1125). Also, Old English had used both SVO and SOV sentence word orders without requiring a grammatical subject. Middle English used SVO and the subject was obligatory (Bright 413).

During the Renaissance, English displaced Latin as the language used in philosophy, science, and other learned arenas. Since English was lexically deficient, it borrowed Latin and Greek words for nouns and adjectives. The International Encyclopedia of Linguistics estimated that during the first 150 years of New English, more than 10,000 words from 50 languages were borrowed. It also asserted that the current English language has borrowed foreign words from more than 75 languages with French as the principal donor. The Old English method of using affixes and compounding to form words was displaced in New English by borrowing words as the favorite way of enlarging the English word stock. According to the Dictionary of Languages, the history of Modern English has three important themes. The themes include the extension of English into new subject areas, the spread of English to many parts of the world, and the growth of English into Standard British English.

The extension of the language began with the first printed English translation of the Bible in 1525. The Authorized Version of the English Bible was translated in 1611. Finally, the revised Book of Common Prayer was published in 1662. The Bible and the prayer book were in everyday use in Anglican churches until the 1970(s), where they influenced the speaking and writing of English for over 300 years. English took the place of Latin during the 16th century in religion, science, and scholarship. To make this transition possible, vast numbers of loan words have been added to the English language.

English has spread to many parts of the world. It became a native language for English-speaking colonies, which are now independent and powerful states. English was spread by British trade and influence. It is the second language of many other states because the ex-colonial countries have no better choice of a national language. English is currently acknowledged as the universal language of diplomacy and science. It is also the language that people usually speak when addressing foreigners, and it is the most popular second language(167).

Standard British English is the widely accepted standard language, the language of London and its elite. It is sometimes called the Kings (or Queens) English, BBC English, and Received Pronunciation. This standard use of English has been helped by the spread of education and literacy, the extension of printing and publishing, and recently the influence of radio and television. All these factors have increased the standardization of pronunciation, spelling, and spoken and written style.

English shares linguistic features with other Indo-European languages. However, the lexicon, morphology, and phonology are characteristically Germanic. One example of this is that past tense inflections are a Germanic characteristic. Another distantly Germanic characteristic is the fixed primary stress on the first syllable, as expressed in the word brother (Bright 410).

An Encyclopedia Dictionary of Language and Languages (AEDLL) describes English as spoken worldwide by a large and ever-increasing number of people. The English language has official status in more than 60 countries. Two diagrams called A Family of Languages and English: the world language follow the bibliography. One shows that English is listed with languages in the West Germanic subgroup, and the other illustrates the use of English in countries around the world today. A summary of the trends allows the prediction that English may become the language of universal communications.

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**Activity: Use the map of the world to show the origin and diffusion of English. Label different countries/areas by date as they accepted English.**