

The Origins of Modern English

by

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English Pronunciation

Look at “**heard**”, an awful word,

It looks like “**beard**” but sounds like “**bird**”.

And “**dead**”: it’s said like “**bed**”, not “**bead**”.

For goodness’ sake, don’t call it “**deed**”!

And watch out for “**meat**” and “**great**” and “**threat**”;

They rhyme with “**suite**” and “**straight**” and “**debt**”!

Why, why, why?!

Why are there regular and irregular verbs?

Why are there so many variations in spelling?

Why is pronunciation so inconsistent?

Why are there so many synonyms?

Why are there no accents to help pronunciation?

The origins give us the answers

A History of Modern English (1)

- **The Celts**

The original inhabitants of the British Isles (around the Iron Age) were the Celts and their language is known as “Celtic”, and is the root of the Scottish, Irish, Welsh and Cornish dialects.



A History of Modern English (1)

Examples of Cornish (17th century) derived from Celtic:

- Durdatha whye! Good day to you!
- Ha soce! Hello friend.
- Betho whye lowenack! Happiness to you!
- Fatla gena whye? How are you?
- Fatel era whye keele? How are you doing?
- Vedo whye cawas badna? Do you want a drop to drink?
- Vedo whye cawas tabm? Do you want a bite to eat?

A History of Modern English (1)

- **The Romans**

Around the 1st Century, the Romans invaded Britain. Their invasion forced most of the Celts to move to the extremes of the country (Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Cornwall). After the invasion, the language spoken in England was Latin, but in extreme areas, Celtic was spoken.



- **The Germans**

Around the 5th century, three Germanic tribes (the Jutes, the Saxons, and the Angles) invaded Britain. The mixture of Celtic, Latin and the Germanic languages became known as "English".

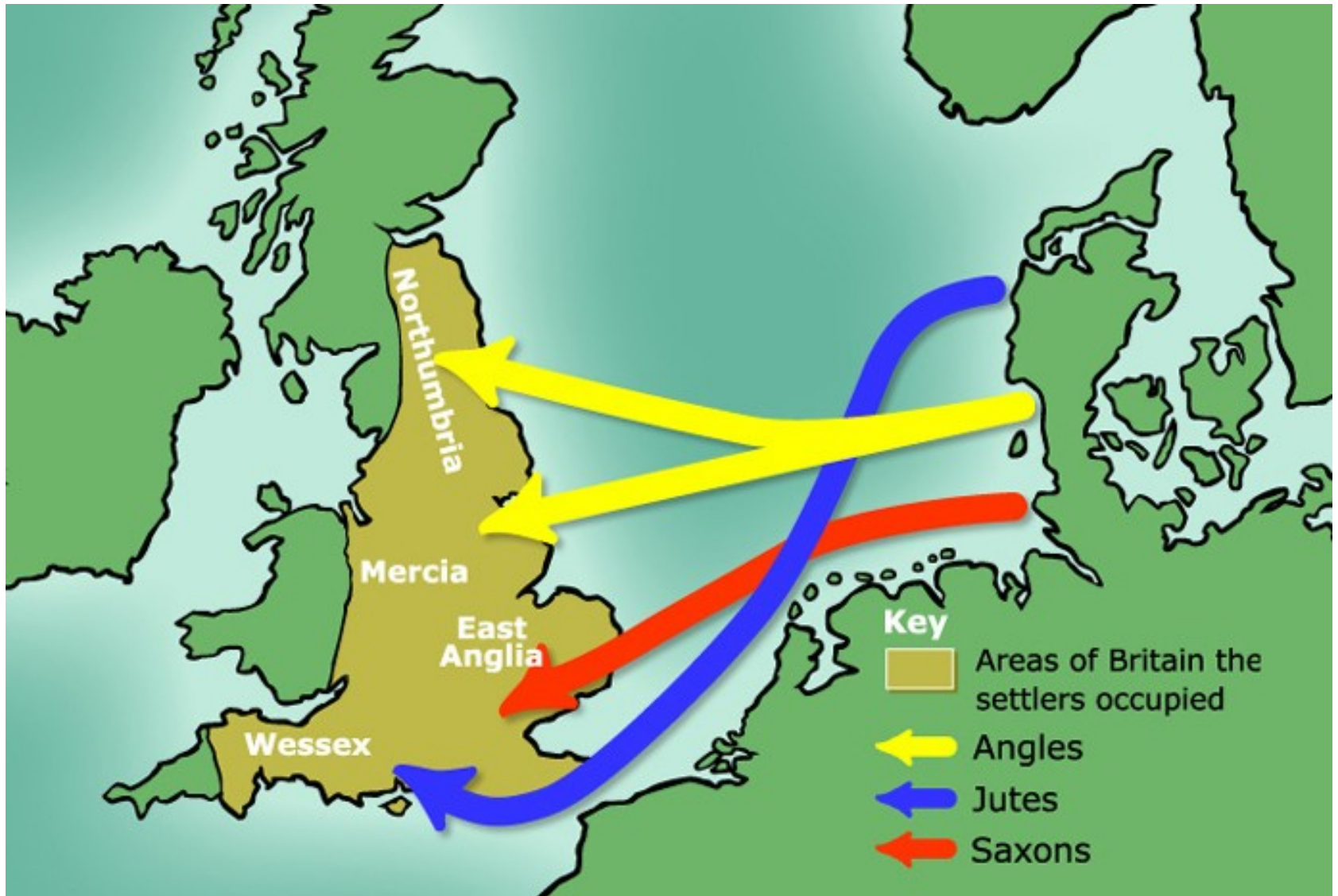


A History of Modern English (1)

Old English (500 - 1100 AD)

The mixing of the languages of the Germanic tribes, Latin and the Celtic language together created a language that is now known as “Old English”. Old English has very little similarity with Modern English, but many words of Modern English can trace their origins to words of Old English. For example:

- henceforth
- hither
- midst
- seek
- shall



The Lord's Prayer in Old English

Matthew 6:9-13

Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum
Si þin nama gehalgod
to becume þin rice
gewurþe ðin willa
on eorðan swa swa on heofonum
urne gedæghwamlican hlaf syle us todæg
and forgyf us ure gyltas
swa swa we forgyfað urum gyltendum
and ne gelæd þu us on costnunge
ac alys us of yfele soþlice

A History of Modern English (2)

The Vikings invaded Britain in the 8th century. They introduced many Scandinavian words to the language.



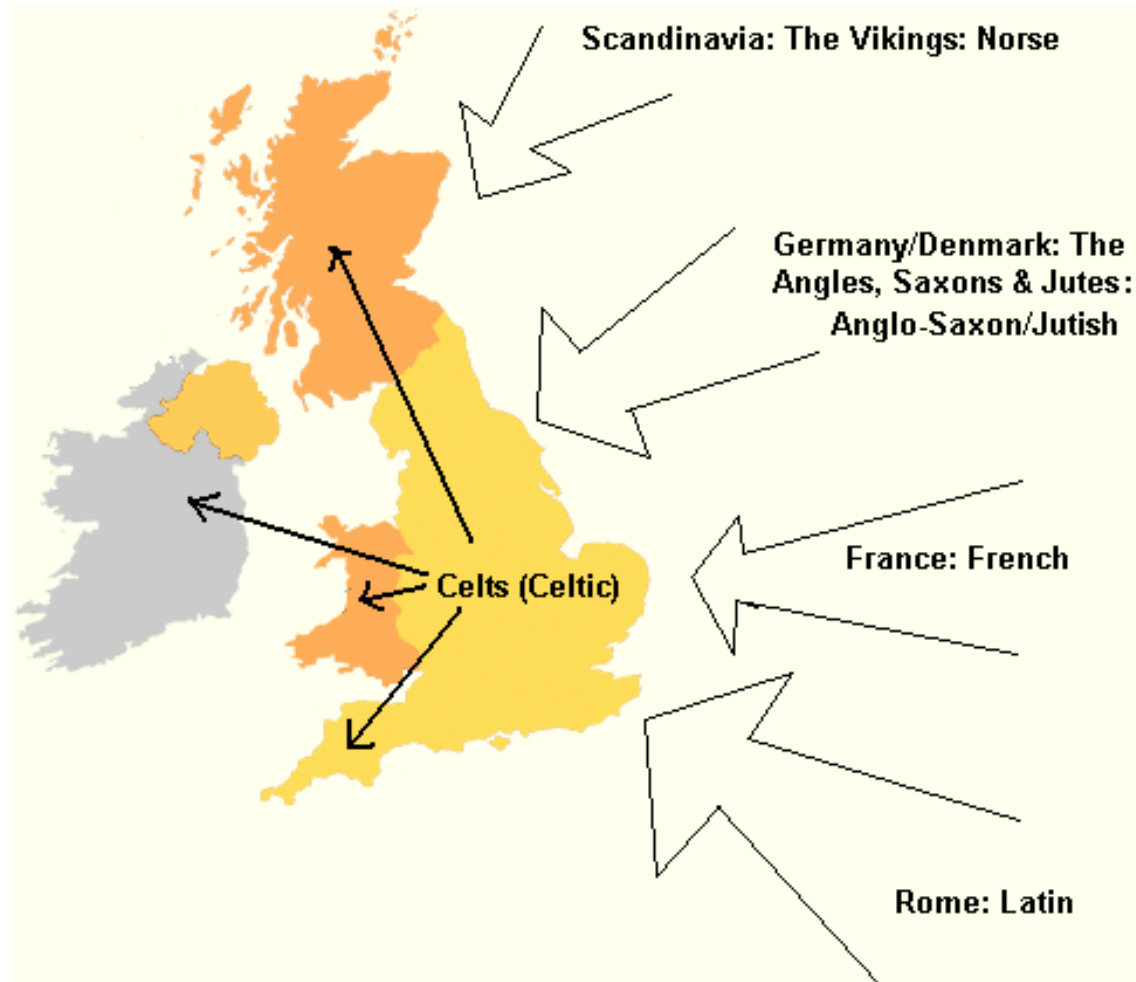
The Normans conquered England in 1066, and their language (an old form of French) gradually mixed with Old English that was spoken in Britain at that time. This mix of Old English and the Norman language became known as “Middle English”. Initially, a linguistic division existed between the classes in England, where the upper classes spoke French and the lower classes spoke Old English.



Psalm 23 in Middle English

Lord my steres, not want shall me:
In stede of fode there me looked he.
He fed me ouer water of fode,
My soul he turns in to good.
He lead me ouer sties of righteousness
For his name, as holy is.
For, and if I go in mid shadow of dread,
For thou with me while iuel shall I not dread;
Thy yherde, and thy staff of might,
They are me roned day and night.
Thou graithed in my sight borde to be,
Ogaines thas that droued me;
Thou fatted in oil my head yhite;
And my drink dronkenand while schire is ite!
And filigh my shall thy mercy
All days of my life for-thy
And that I wone in house of lord is
In length of days al with bliss

Origins and Influences



Examples of Vocabulary

Celtic: loch, whisky, trousers, penguin / regular verbs

Latin: drama, animal, doctor, triangle / regular verbs

Anglo-Saxon: always, beach, drink, teach / irregular verbs

Jutish: blitz, milk, kindergarten, finger, horse / irregular verbs

French: fragrance, attraction, certain, definition / regular verbs

Norse: cake, ugly, husband, awkward, egg, give / irregular verbs

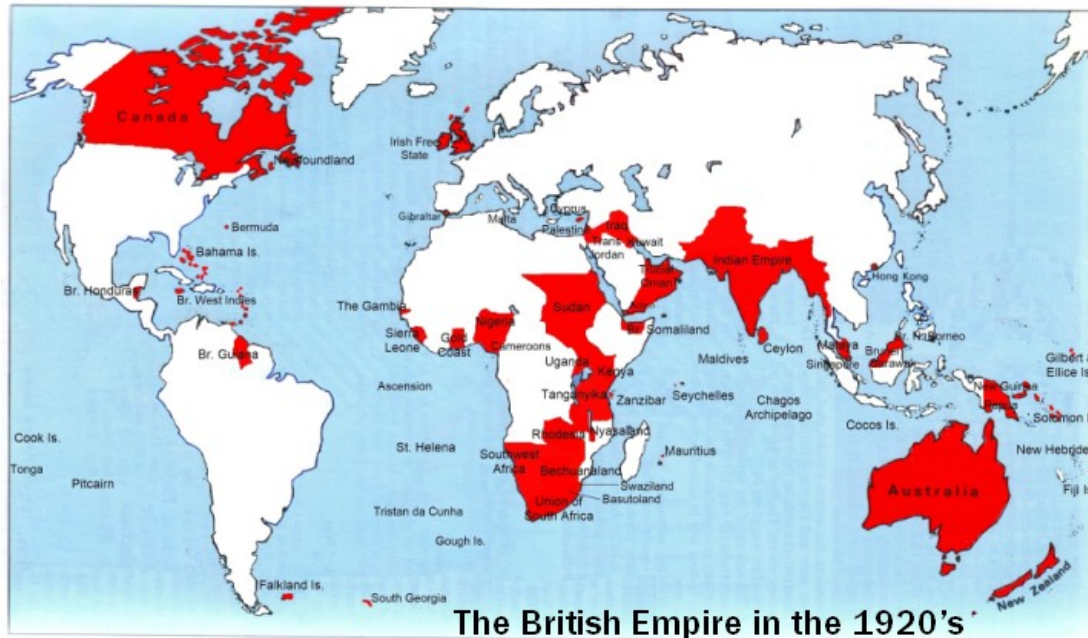
A History of Modern English (3)

During the 16th century, British explorers and traders communicated with many people from different parts of the world, and this eventually led to the absorption of many foreign words (for example from **Sanskrit**, **Urdu**, **Russian** and **Polish**) into the language of Britain.

There were also many attempts to attack and conquer England by the **French** (in 1216 and 1545), the **Spanish** (in 1588), the **Dutch** (in 1688) and the **Germans** (in 1940). But these attacks were not successful!

A History of Modern English (3)

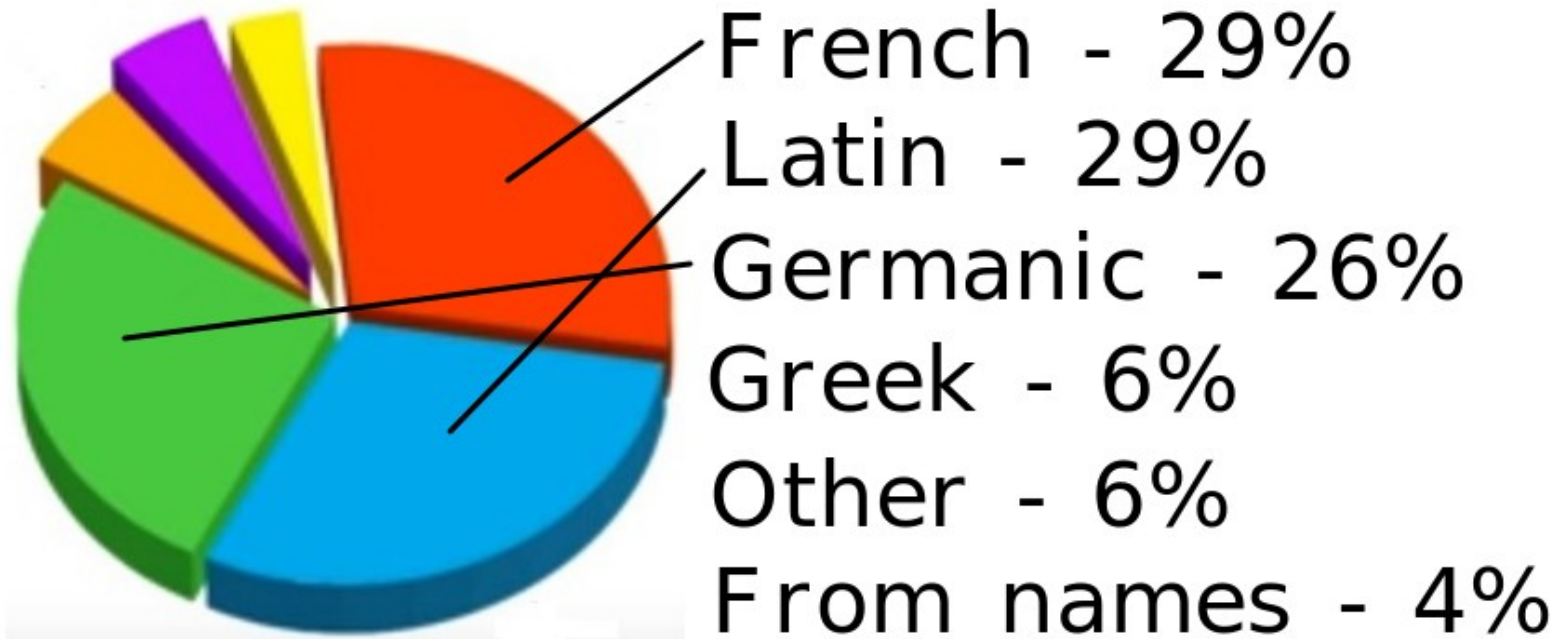
The expansion of the British Empire in the 19th century also assisted in the adoption of numerous foreign words and phrases.



Words adopted from other languages

Arabic:	alcohol, algebra
Celtic:	penguin, maggot
Czech:	robot
Dutch:	lottery
French:	ambulance, diplomat, parachute
Jutish:	blitz, quartz
Hebrew:	kosher
Hindi:	jungle, shampoo
Japanese:	judo, karate, tycoon
Latin:	data, maximum, uniform
Mandarin:	kung fu, typhoon
Norse:	fjord, ski
Portuguese:	massage, pickaninny, piranha, savvy, embarrass, cashew
Russian:	vodka, cosmonaut
Spanish:	orange, negro
Swahili:	dengue
Thai:	siamese
Turkish:	caviar, kebab, tulip, yoghurt

English Vocabulary



15th century: Changes

To distance themselves from French occupation, and the French language, English pronunciation was deliberately changed and accent marks were removed in writing.

After these deliberate changes in the language (both written and spoken), the English people spoke what we call “Early Modern English” (in Shakespeare’s day). An example is shown on the next slide.

Shakespeare: Sonnet XVIII

Shall I compare **thee** to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

And summer's lease **hath** all too short a date:

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,

And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;

And every fair from fair sometime declines,

By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;

But **thy** eternal summer shall not fade,

Nor lose possession of that fair **thou owest**,

Nor shall Death brag **thou** wander'st in his shade,

When in eternal lines to time **thou grow'st**;

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,

So long lives this, and this gives life to **thee**.

Regular Verbs

These came from Celtic, Latin and French.

The general rule is: *add “ed”*

The origin of this is believed to be: “did”

Example: “paint did” → “painted”

Irregular Verbs

These came from Scandinavian and Germanic languages.

The rule was: “*change the vowel*”:

drink/drank

blow/blew

keep/kept

sit/sat

know/knew

sleep/slept

shrink/shrank

grow/grew

weep/wept

stink/stank

throw/threw

sing/sang

ring/rang

drive/drove

spring/sprang

dive/dove

swim/swam

write/wrote

A Special Case: Why is “went” the past of “go”?

The words “go” and “went” came from two different verbs in Middle English (before 1200):

go / gode / goden

wend / wente / went

and, for some unknown reason, around 1200, the past of “go” (gode) was replaced with the past of “wend” (wente), perhaps through common usage. Later, the “e” was removed. Today, “wend” still exists but is a regular verb:

go / went / gone

wend / wended / wended

An Evolving Language

Through common usage, some irregular verbs
are becoming regular:

dream: dreamt → dreamed

burn: burnt → burned

learn: learnt → learned

dwell: dwelt → dwelled

Wouldn't it be easy if they all changed ?!

Changes through Mistakes

Oranges were originally imported from a Spanish-speaking country and were called “**naranjas**”.

However, through a misunderstanding, an accidental change occurred:

a naranja → an aranja → an orange

Languages constantly evolve

New vocabulary from technology:

- **internet**
- **laptop**
- **tweet**

New vocabulary from new usage:

- **gay** = “happy” (before 1960) → “homosexual” (today)
- **mad** = “crazy” (Old English) → “angry” (Modern English)
- **to be like** = “to say” (see video “be like.mp4”)

New vocabulary through laziness and/or a desire to speak faster:

- **gonna** = “going to”
- **wanna** = “want to” or “want a”
- **lotta** = “lot of”
- **gotta** = “got to” / “have to”

Mixed Origins

Modern English has many synonyms because they have different origins. For example:

- 1) speed - Germanic origin
- velocity - Latin origin (“velocitatem”)
- 2) water - Germanic origin (“wasser”)
- hydro - Greek origin
- aquatic - Latin origin (“aquaticus”)

Modern English

American English is probably the most dominant type of English in the world today. The vast reach of American films and series has attributed to the global popularity of American English. A number of Spanish words, West African words, and French words have also been incorporated into American English.

There are many versions of the Modern English language, for example, in Australia, Canada, India, Ireland, Israel, Jamaica, Kenya, New Zealand, Nigeria, South African, the UK and the USA.

Goodbye

God be wi ye (1600) →

(Means “God be with you”)

Godbwye (1800) →

Goodbye (1900)

“God” changed to “Good” possibly due to the influence of “Good day” and “Goodnight”, etc.

Recommended videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=klzFz9T5rhI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lol78Eh3UD8>