8 The role of foreign languages in the development of English

From the earliest stages, English came into contact with a number of different foreign languages. The interaction of speakers of English with foreigners inevitably influenced the structure of the English language. The most noticeable influence of contact languages was on the vocabulary, though other levels of the language system were affected as well. The focus of this chapter is on the lexical influence of Latin, Scandinavian, and Norman and French, i.e. languages that left most distinct footprints in the shape of the English language. The Celtic influence is mentioned only very briefly because its extent was rather limited. The passages below have been taken over from Hladký's *Guide to Pre-Modern English* (2003, pp. 318–325) with minor modifications.

The situation at the beginning of the development of English

The full extent of the Old English vocabulary is not known because many words were not recorded in Old English texts. The lowest estimate of the size of the Old English vocabulary is about thirty thousand words, which corresponds to the number of words used by modern educated speakers.

The Old English vocabulary was almost purely Germanic and the number of borrowings was very low. The oldest layer of the Old English vocabulary is formed by words which are common to all or nearly all Indo-European languages: terms of kinship (*brōðor, sweostor, mōdor, dohtor, sunu*), parts of human body (*næġl, beard*), names of natural phenomena and of plants and animals (*sunne, mōna, mere* 'sea', *snāw, trēōw, wulf, ottor, eolh* 'elk'), verbs referring to the basic activities of man (*dōn, bēōn*), adjectives denoting the most essential qualities (*long, nīwe*), personal and demonstrative pronouns and numerals (*iċ, þū, mīn, twā, þrī*).

The common Germanic layer contains words connected with nature (*eorþe, land, sand, sea, sċēāp* 'sheep', *fox*) and with human life and activities (*arm, findan, macian, steorfan, singan*).

The Old English vocabulary contained a small group of words which are not found in other Germanic dialects. There are very few etymologically independent words, e.g. *brid* 'bird' and *clipian* 'to call'. Most words in this category are compounds or derivations based on Germanic roots, e.g. *wīfman, hlāford* (*hlāf* 'bread', ModE *loaf*, + *weard* 'keeper'; *hlāford* was ultimately shortened to *lord*), *hlǣfdiġe* (*hlāf* + **diġ-* 'knead'; ultimately shortened to *lady*), *sċīrġerēfa* (*sċīr* 'shire, county' + *ġerēfa* 'chief', ultimately shortened to *sheriff*).

The number of borrowings into Old English is very low, the estimate being about 3 %. Most of them came from Latin.

8.1 Celtic influence

Although Anglo-Saxons were in contact with Celtic tribes both on the Continent and after their arrival in Britain, the lexical influence of Celtic languages on English is limited to place names (e.g. *Avon, Devon, Dover, Thames, York*) and a small number of common nouns. An important word that entered English via the Celtic Old Irish language (Old Gaelic) is the word *cross* (of Latin origin).

8.2 Latin influence

Old English was influenced by Latin in three stages. In the first stage Latin words were taken over when the Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Frisians were still on the continent, i.e. before the beginning of the development of Old English. The second and the third stages occurred on English soil and connected with the arrival of Christianity and with the Benedictine reform. The borrowings were all motivated by the need for the denotation of new concepts. The Old English Latin borrowings thus differ from Latin borrowings in the Middle English and Early Modern English periods (during the revival of learning), in which Latin words were often taken over although adequate native words were available.

8.2.1 Continental borrowings

The continental borrowings, shared by other Germanic languages, resulted from direct contacts with the Romans. The Germanic population living within the Roman Empire in the fourth century AD is estimated at several million. They worked as slaves in the fields, they served in the army not only as ordinary soldiers but also as commanders. A very important city of Augusta Treverorum in Gaul (the present city of Trier in Germany), an intersection of eight military roads, was very close to the border. In the third and fourth centuries Treves was the most flourishing city in Gaul with several Christian churches. Roman merchants travelled into all parts of the Germanic territory, including Scandinavia. The new words which some of the Germanic tribes learned from the Romans then spread to other Germanic dialects. Although the number is not very high, about 150 words, they are all very important words. The following selection, divided into several semantic fields, shows that contacts with the Romans brought about changes in the everyday life of the Germanic peoples.

Continental borrowings:

Military actions:
OE *camp* 'battle', OE *weall* 'wall', OE *strēt* 'road'

Measure and distance:
OE *mīl* 'mile', OE *pund* 'pound', OE *ynċe* 'inch'

Trade:
OE *ċēāp* 'bargain, price, market' (ModE *cheap, Cheapside, Chapman*), OE *ċist* 'chest', OE *mangere* 'monger', OE *mynet* 'mint, coin of money', OE *sacc* 'sack', OE *toll* 'payment, toll'

Food and drink:
OE *butere* 'butter', OE *ċēse* 'cheese', OE *wīn* 'wine',

Cooking:
OE *cyċene* 'kitchen', OE *ċetel* 'kettle', OE *disċ* 'dish', OE *mylen* 'mill'

Plants:
OE *bēte* 'beet', OE *ċiris* 'cherry', OE *cāwel, cāul* 'cole', OE *lilie* 'lily', OE *minte* 'mint', OE *palm, palma, palme* 'palm', OE *persoc* 'peach', OE *pere, peru* 'pear', OE *piper, pipor* 'pepper', OE *plūme* 'plum', OE *popæġ, papæġ > popiġ* 'poppy'

Animals:
OE *draca* 'drake, dragon', OE *mūl* 'mule', OE *pāwa, pēa* 'peacock'

Building arts:
OE *ċealc* 'chalk', OE *copor* 'copper', OE *piċ* 'pitch', OE *pytt* 'pit', OE *tiġele* 'tile'

Education: OE *scōl, scolu* 'school'

Church and religion:
 OE *ærc* 'ark', OE *bisċeop* 'bishop', OE *cāsere* 'emperor', OE *ċiriċe* 'church', OE *dēōfol* 'devil', OE *engel* 'angel', OE *Sætern(es)dæġ, Sæterdæġ*, translation of *Sāturnī diēs*

8.2.2 Insular borrowings

When the Germanic tribes settled in England, they learned a few Latin words from the Romanized people of the towns, e.g. OE *ċeaster* 'Roman fortified town' from L *castra*, and *port* 'harbour', from L *portus*. The word *ceaster* survives in place-names: *Chester, Winchester, Doncaster, Leicester, Exeter*. The word *port* was probably forgotten later and the modern word entered English from Old French. Another Latin word probably borrowed from the Celts was *wīc* 'village', from Latin *vīcus*. It survives as a dialectal word and in placenames, e.g. *Harwich, Berwick*.

The second stage of Latin influence is connected with the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity in the six and seventh centuries. In 596 Pope Gregory the Great sent Abbot Augustine to England. Augustine converted the king of Kent and founded the monastery at Canterbury. Irish missionaries founded Lindisfarne in Northumbria about 640.

The Anglo-Saxons knew about some phenomena of Christianity centuries before they were converted, which is proved by a few words from the Christian terminology they learned before coming to England (*bisċeop, ċiriċe, dēōfol, engel* mentioned above).

Insular borrowings:

Religion and the Church:
abbot, apostle, balsam, creed, disciple, font, martyr, mass, minster, monk, nun, offer, organ, pall, pope, priest, provost, psalm, Sabath, temple

Household and clothing:
candle, cap, cowl, silk, sponge

Plants, herbs and trees:
box (buxus), cedar, lily, pine,

Food:
fennel, ginger, lobster, mussel,

Other words:
circle, coulter, crisp, fan, lever, talent, title, zephyr

The meaning of some of these words changed during the centuries, e.g. *offer* was limited in OE to 'present as an act of worship', the modern meaning coming from OF *offrir*.

Old English words which translated Latin words and their modern equivalents (i.e. the original Latin words which were taken over later, during the Middle English period):

witega – prophet
heah fæder – patriarch
fullian – baptize
ġewritu – Scriptures

8.2.3 The revival of learning

Thousands of words were taken over from Latin and Greek during the revival of learning in the 15th and 16th centuries, for example:

Latin:
apparatus, area, axis, bacillus, curriculum, genius, maximum, series, veto

Greek:
acrobat, athlete, atom, catastrophe, crisis, cycle, diagnosis, encyclopaedia, panic, symbiosis

8.3 Scandinavian influence

The Scandinavians did not on the whole differ from the Anglo-Saxon as far as the stage of civilization was concerned. The Scandinavians were probably better at shipbuilding and in the arts of war but on the other hand they were still heathen. A rough estimate of loans from Scandinavian is 700–900 words, aside from archaic or regional items. Most of the Scandinavian words were adopted during the Middle English period, when central and northern dialects of English, which had been in close contact with the Scandinavian language since the 9th century, became more prominent than southern dialects. During the Old English period, probably only about 100 words were borrowed from Scandinavian.

An important element of the Scandinavian influence is the introduction of non-palatalized pronunciations in words like *skirt, kettle, dike, give, or egg.* In Old English, the original Proto-Germanic consonants k [k], sc [sk], and ȝ [ɣ], were palatalized in the neighbourhood of palatal vowels into [tʃ], [ʃ], and [j]. Palatalization, however, did not take place in Scandinavian dialects. Most ModE words with [k], [sk], and [g] (from [ɣ]) in the neighbourhood of palatal vowels (in the case of [sk] even in the neighbourhood of velar vowels) are therefore of Scandinavian origin, for example *scale, skill, skin, score, skulk, sky, get, give, egg.* The

Old English words had palatal pronunciation, for example *ġietan* 'get', *ġiefan* 'give', *æġ* 'egg'. In some cases, both forms have survived – the palatalized Old English and the non-palatalized Scandinavian form, for example *shirt* and *ditch* (of Anglo-Saxon origin) and *skirt* and *dike* (of Scandinavian origin). Some words beginning with [sk] are of Graeco-Latin origin, for example *scheme, school, or skeleton.*

The following lists contain selections of words whose Scandinavian origin has been proved:

Nouns:
anger, bank (of a river), *bark* (of a tree), *booth, brink, bull, cake, calf* (of a leg), *crook, dike, dirt*, *down* ('fethers'), *egg, fellow, gap, gate, gift, husband, kettle, kid, knife* (it replaced the OE *seax*), *law* (it replaced the OE *dōm*), *leg* (it replaced the OE *sċeanca* > ModE *shank*), *link, loan, loft, race, reindeer, root* (it replaced the OE *wyrt*), *scale* ('weighing instrument'), *score, scrap, seat, sister* (it replaced the OE *sweostor*), *skill, skin* (this enables specialization between *skin* and *hide* < OE *hīd*), *skirt, sky, slaughter, stack, steak, thrift, Thursday, want, whisk, window*, *wing* (it replaced the OE *feþer*)

Pronouns:
same (it replaced the OE *ilca* and *self*), *they.*

The most interesting case of a Scandinavian loan is the pronoun *they*, which during the Middle English period replaced the Old English pronoun *hīē/hī*. This loan is especially noteworthy: it happens very rarely that a personal pronoun is taken over from some other language. As a rule, personal pronouns belong to the most stable component parts of the grammatical system. However, some of the forms of the Old English 3rd person plural pronoun were similar to or even identical with some of the 3rd person singular forms (see Section 4.2.3), which may have been one of the causes of the replacement. The takeover of the Scandinavian *they* supplies convincing evidence of the degree of domestication of the Scandinavian nationality in the English ethnical environment. (Vachek 1991)

Adjectives:
awkward, flat, happy, ill, loose, low, odd, rotten, seemly, tight, ugly, weak, wrong

Verbs:
call, cast (it replaced the OE *weorpan*), *clip, drown, gasp, get, give, glitter, hit, kindle, lift, raise, scare, scrape, seem, take* (it replaced the OE *niman*), *thrust, want*

Adverbs:
nay, though

Prepositions:
fro (in dialects, now an adverb in *to and fro*), *till*

Place names ending in:
 -by (Scandinavian 'village'), *-thorp/torp, -beck, -dale, -thwaite*

8.4 Norman and French influence

During the Middle English period, the English language was strongly influenced by Norman French (in the initial stage) and Central French (from ca. 1250). After the arrival of the Normans (a Germanic tribe speaking a variety of French) in 1066, the roles of English, Norman French, and Latin were given by the official policy of the court. The king's court, religious communities and aristocratic estates were sources of French influence. The kings and the feudal lords were all speakers of French; they spent time on their continental estates and they married other French speakers. Legal documents were prepared in French. Monastic life was dominated by French speakers, although the language of the liturgy and of written documents was Latin. Chronicles were mostly written in Latin. Learned works in history and theology were also written in Latin. Only about two per cent of the population spoke French but they occupied the powerful positions at the court, in the church, and in urban centres. The great mass of population spoke English and English was the language of ordinary trade and agriculture.

The top leaders could afford to ignore English because they were surrounded by French speakers. When needed, they could hire translators. The local lords and tradesmen, however, had to communicate with English-speaking labourers and they became bilingual.

The balance between English, French and Latin was upset in 1204 when King John lost Normandy to Philip II of France, isolating the Normans from their continental lands and thus encouraging the use of English by the aristocracy. The use of French, however, was not limited. On the contrary, French came to be regarded as the sole language of government records and by 1300 it had virtually replaced Latin in most official documents. Edward III issued an act in 1362 requiring the use of English as the language of the oral proceedings in courts. Records of the proceedings, however, were still made in Latin and laws were written in French. A law prohibiting the use of French and Latin in legal records was passed in 1733.

The differences between the two phases of French influence can be shown in the following pairs of words (the first word is Norman French, the second is Central French):
capital – chapter, catch – chase, cattle – chattel, launch – lance

In the Modern English pairs *ward – guard, warranty – guarantee, war – guerilla*, the words with the initial *w-* were have been taken over from Norman French, while the words with the initial *g-* come from Central French. Both forms are in fact of Germanic origin; however, in Central French the initial consonant of the Germanic loan word changed into *g-*.

Below are examples of English words of French origin:

Government:
crown, govern, nation, state (but *king, queen, lord, and lady* are of Anglo-Saxon origin)

Army:
admiral, army, artillery, battle, captain, cavalry, colonel, general, peace, soldier

Church:
cloister, friar, religion., saint, service

Law:
case, court, crime, heir, justice, judge, jury, marriage, prison, summon

Cuisine:
beef, boil, custard, dinner, fry, marmalade, mayonnaise, mustard, mutton, pastry, pork, sauce, soup, supper, veal

Dressing:
costume, dress, garment

Art:
art, collage, colour, column, paint, palace, vault

Moral ideas:
charity, conscience, duty, mercy, pity

Phonemic aspect of the French influence

In Old English, the voiceless spirants [f], [s], [θ] and the voiced spirants [v], [z], [ð] were variants (allophones) of the phonemes f/v, s/z, θ/ð. In Middle English, borrowings from French introduced words like *vēle* 'veal' and *zēle* 'zeal', with voiced pronunciations in initial positions, contrasting with Anglo-Saxon words *fēlen* 'feel' and *sēl* 'seal'. As a result, the allophones f/v and s/z split into separate phonemes: f and v; and s, and z.

During the Middle English period, two new diphthongs of French origin were added to those already existing in English: *oi*, and *ui*. These diphthongs are reflected in the ModE words like *choice, cloister, employ, noise, or rejoice* (originally [oi]); and *boil, point, joint* (originally [ui]).

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