

FOREIGN ELEMENTS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE VOCABULARY

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ABSTRACT

With the United Kingdom and the United States of America as the giants of the world economic power, the importance of English, which is the first language of these countries, is naturally and undeniably great. Claimed as having more than 500,000 in word power, no other languages in the world has been its equal though some like French and Spanish have attempted to compete against it. What makes English acceptable worldwide is its vocabulary. The mixed character of its vocabulary through adoption, assimilation and incorporation from other languages enables it to be 'shared' by the speakers of the languages it borrows, and thus, makes it some kind of familiar to those speakers.

INTRODUCTION

The English Language, which did not even exist 2,000 years ago, is now used by at least 750 million people all over the world. Statistically, half of this figure speaks this language as a mother tongue. This claim is further enhanced by McRum et al (1992) that the English Language "*has become the language of the planet, the first truly global language*" as "*... nearly half of all business deals in Europe are conducted in English*" and "*... is the official voice of the air, of the sea, and of Christianity...*" (p10)..

One of the most prominent aspects that makes English has the 'global sway' unlike its other rivals like French, Spanish and German, is its rich, mixed and colourful vocabulary. The Oxford English Dictionary lists about 500,000 words, which is about five times more than the amount of German and French,

which are its closest rivals. One of the reasons for this large vocabulary is due to the English Language tendency to go outside her own linguistic resources and borrow from other languages. As observed by Emerson (in McRum et al, 1992, p1), “ ... *the English Language is the sea which receives tributaries from every region under heaven.*” These tributaries do not only bring great wealth to the English vocabulary, its capacity of assimilating those outside elements has become one of its greatest asset to attain international use.

A study of new vocabulary over the fifty years period (1941 -1991) by Algeo, 1991 finds that borrowed words from other languages that are known as **loanwords**, make up two percent of the English vocabulary. Another study of more than a thousand loanwords by Cannon (1987), specifically draws the percentage of the words origin as the following:

LOANWORDS ORIGIN	PERCENTAGE
French	25
Japanese	8
Spanish	8
Italian	7
Latin	7
African	6
German	6
Greek	6
Russian and Yiddish	4
Others	23

Although English continuously borrow words from almost every language existed in the world, there is also a shift in the importance of the languages (from which the words are borrowed). For example, Latin that was once a rich source of loanwords has now declined its importance as opposed to Japanese due to the increasing industrial and commercial importance of Japan.

FOREIGN LOANWORDS IN ENGLISH

Before looking at the origins of some loanwords, it is very important to understand the difference between **popular loanwords** and **learned**

loanwords. Popular loanwords are the vocabulary of oral communication that revolves around common and everyday subjects. The words are assimilated successfully in English and have gone through phonological developments that the users may not be aware of their foreign origin. Learned words, on the other hand, are the results of scholastic influences, where during the Old English period, would be in the church. These words may be confined to a certain class or group of people. For instance, the word *cleric* (clerk) was a learned word to signify a *clergyman*. However, in time, learned words have become part of everyday vocabulary as *clerk* is now used for greater scopes like *scholar*, *scribe*, *one in charge of records and accounts in an organization*, and the latest American English denotes the word as *one who waits upon customers in a retail establishment*.

As English has received “*tributaries from every region under heaven*”, it is not a simple task to determine the origins of the loanwords. For example, the word *port* is arguable as a Latin origin *portus* (harbour), or French *porter* (to carry), or even Portuguese *oporto* (the port). A more complex example is the word *chess* that has gone through several languages before it was adopted and adapted into English. A study of etymology traces that the word *chess* was borrowed from Middle French *eschec* in the fourteenth century, which was earlier borrowed from Arabic, of which had also been borrowed before that from Persian *shah* meaning **king**. This shows that the historical background of a loanword is very complex.

However, attempts to determine the origins of the loanwords have been made possible through judging the words by either their form or meaning. Significantly, the form of the words can also indicate the time at which the words were borrowed. For example, *scol* in Old English (school) must have been adopted later than *scrin* (scrinium) because of the change in the Old English sound system of [sk] to [s-] (Serjeantson, 1935, in Pyles, 1993, p288). However, the phonological changes are not discussed here as this paper is concentrating on the foreign loanwords only.

CELTIC LOANWORDS

The contribution of Celtic words into English is very small. This is because the British Celts were a submerged race and conquering people are unlikely to

adopt many words from those whom they have supplemented. Thus, the Celts were not in the position to make any significant contribution to Anglo-Saxon civilization. There were however, a number of evidence of genuine Celtic words acquired during the early years of the English settlements in terms of **place names**. For example, the kingdom of *Kent* is originated from the Celtic word *Canti* or *Cantion*. *Winchester*, *Salisbury*, *Exeter*, *Gloucester* and *Worcester* are some examples of place names that have Celtic origin. Even *London* itself is suggested as having a Celtic source.

The largest numbers of Celtic names survive in the names **rivers** and **hills** such as *Thames*, *Avon*, *Dover* and *Wye*. Since a large number of the defeated Celts during the Germanic conquest retreated to the west, undoubtedly the Celtic place names are more common in the west compared to in the east and southeast.

Although the Celtic Language imposed the least influence that affected the English Language, some of the words attained a permanent place in the English vocabulary. This is due to the popular words used by the Anglo-Saxon **through everyday contact with the natives**. Thus, words like *hinn* (basket, crib), *bratt* (cloak) and *brocc* (brock or badger) become permanent features in English. From the activities of **spreading Christian doctrine**, words that were learned like *cine* (a gathering of parchment leaves) *clugge* (bell) and *cursian* (to curse) came into use in Old English.

LATIN LOANWORDS

Latin imposed a great influence on English. This is because it was not the language of a conquered people but the language of a civilization. Thus, English had borrowed freely from Latin as early as the Old English period to the Modern English period.

Old English Period

The early loanwords from Latin indicate special spheres in which the Romans were thought to be excelled (Serjeantson, 1935, in Pyles, p287). Many of the words have survived into Modern English such as *butere* (butter), *cealc* (chalk) and *cetel* (kettle).

Chronologically, there has been evidence showing that the borrowing of Latin words took place during three significant periods before the end of Old English time:

Zero Period

The first adoption of Latin words into English was due to the early contact between the Romans and the Germanic tribes in the continent. These early adopted words were associated with **war** like those of *camp* (battle), *segn* (banner), *pil* (javelin), *pytt* (pit) and *weal* (wall). Words that were connected with **trade** also found their way into English. Thus, words like *ceap* (cheap), *mangian* (to trade), *mangere* (monger), *pund* (pound), *mydd* (bushel) and *mynet* (coin) were fundamental to this aspect. Since **wine trade** was one of the most important branches of Roman commerce, words like *win* (wine), *must* (new wine) and *eced* (vinegar) were brought in.

Other borrowed words are related to **domestic life, household articles and clothing** such as *cytel* (kettle), *teped* (carpet, curtain), *pyle* (pillow) and *sigel* (brooch and necklace). In addition, Roman words for **food** like *ciese* (cheese), *pipor* (pepper), *plume* (plum), *pise* (pea) and *minte* (mint); and **building arts** like *copor* (copper) and *tigele* (tile) have become native-like in the English vocabulary. Miscellaneous words like *mul* (mule), *draca* (dragon), *pipe* (musical instrument) and *biscop* (bishop) are also evidence of the earliest loanwords from Roman.

First Period

There was only a relatively small Latin influence on English during this period. It is suggested that the use of Latin as a spoken language did not long survive the end of Roman rule in Britain. In addition, the remnants might be lost in the derangement during the German conquest. Thus, there was no opportunity for direct contact between Latin and Old English. During this period, Latin words could have been adopted through Celtic transmission. Words like *candel* (candle), *ceaster* (city) and *castra* (camp) are examples of Latin that were acquired directly from the Celts.

Second Period

The greatest influence of Latin vocabulary during the Old English period was significantly marked by the christianing of Britain in 597. Not only this occasion had broadened the English people's horizon through language, it also "*marks the real beginning of the English habit of freely incorporating foreign elements into its vocabulary*" (Baugh, 1993, p90).

The ardent activity of **church building** and the **establishing of monasteries** during the century was responsible for the rapid borrowing of Latin words into the vocabulary. In statistics, a large number of Latin words were accepted and thoroughly incorporated into the English Language. Some of the words still survive in the Modern English and the majority of them revolve around **church** and **its services** like *abbot*, *alms*, *altar* and *deacon*. In relation to church, its influence on **learning** and **education** is reflected by the words *school*, *master*, *verse* and *meter*.

The church influence on the **domestic life** is evidenced by the adoption of words on **clothing** and **household** use such as *cap*, *sock*, *silk*, *chest* and *mat*. Words that denote **food** and **names of trees, plants** and **herbs** also found their way into the wordstock.

Middle English Period

Although more borrowings from Latin took place during the Middle English period, most of the words were still associated with **church** and **religion**. Addition to these words included **legal terms** like *client*, *conviction*, and *subpoena*; and words that were connected with **scholastic activities** like *library*, *scribe* and *simile*. **Scientific words** like *dissolve*, *equal*, *essence*, *medicine* and *mercury* also started to flow in. **Verbs** like *admit*, *commit* and *discuss*, and **adjectives** like *compete*, *imaginary* and *instant* also contributed to the enrichment of the wordstock.

Modern English Period

This is the greatest period of borrowing from Latin. The present day loanwords are derived from Latin morphemes which is known as **neo-Latin** forms. For example, *aleatric* is actually etymologically Latin which means *dependant on chance* from Latin *aleator* (gambler or dice player), and so are *circadian*

(functioning or recurring 24 hour cycles) from Latin *circadiem* (around the day), and *vexillology* (study of flags) from Latin *vellum* (flag or banner).

SCANDINAVIAN LOANWORDS

Although there was no written record of Scandinavian words in old English until the period of Middle English, it cannot be argued that the Scandinavian language had exerted its influence after the conquest. The Scandinavian loanwords are evidenced by the **place names** like those that end with *-by* which means **farm** or **town** (Grimsby, Whitby, Derby and Rugby); *-thorp* meaning **village** (Althorp and Linthorp); and *-thwaite* which implies **an isolated piece of land** (Applethwaite and Braithwaite).

The Scandinavians, who were also commonly known as the Vikings, were brave sea-rovers who began their activities in plundering and ended in conquest. Thus, the earliest loanwords were associated with **sea-roving** and **ravaging** people. As a result, words like *barda* (beaked ship), *cnearr* (small warship), *scegp* (vessel), *scegpmann* (pirate) and *dreng* (warrior) appeared in Old English.

Later, words associated with **law** or **characteristics of the social and administrative system of Danelaw** entered the English lexicon. *Mal* (action at law), *hold* (free holder) and *wapentake* (an administrative district) are some of the examples.

The close resemblance between Old English and the Scandinavian language has sometimes made it impossible to trace the origin of a given word in Modern English - whether it is a native or borrowed word. In some cases, however, a borrowed or loanword can be recognized through certain criteria:

- a. **sound development of /sh/ and /sk/** : words like *ship*, *shall* and *fish* are English words while *sky*, *skin* and *scrape* denote the Scandinavian lexicon;
- b. **vowel of a word** : the diphthong of /ai/ was /a/ in Old English while in Scandinavian it was /ei or /e/;
- c. the **initial [g] and [k] before front vowel** were the prominent character of Scandinavian language like *gear*, *gill* and *geld*.

The Scandinavian and English words were used side by side. The Scandinavian loanwords were characterized as the language of everyday life like:

- a. **noun** : *axle-tree, band, birth, window*
- b. **verb** : *to bait, bask, call*
- c. **adjective** : *awkward, flat, ill, loose*

The above examples show that the Scandinavian loanwords posed no significant need in the English vocabulary, unlike the need of Latin for Christianity or religious affairs. It was simply as a result of the mixture of two groups of people. However, there are circumstances of the survival of one or the other language through the periods of the development of English:

- a. if words in both languages were similar in form and meaning, the modern words stand at the same time for both languages. Words like *burn, drag* and *fast* are a few that survive;
- b. if there were differences in form, the English words often survive;
- c. if, on the other hand, the words had long been concurrently used, the Scandinavian would survive. For example, the Scandinavian *egg* survives the Old English *ey*;
- d. English words that were uncommonly used like *till, dale* and *bend*, were reinforced or reintroduced from the Scandinavian words;
- e. some English words were modified, employing the character of identical Scandinavian words like *Thursday* instead of Old English *Thurnesday*.

GREEK LOANWORDS

Greek words had found their way into English through Latin. The word *church*, for instance, was ultimately Greek. Latin words like *allegory, anemia, chaos, comedy* and *dilemma* were originated from Greek and so were French words like *character, chronicle, diet* and *ecstasy*. Greek was prestiged to be a classical language and erudition (Pyles, 1993, p291). However, as far as English was concerned, Greek words were introduced through Latin. Greek books were translated expansively Latin to ensure wider circulation all

over Europe. Some Greek words that have been incorporated into everyday speech are *acronym*, *chlorine*, *idiosyncrasy* and *telegram*.

FRENCH LOANWORDS

There was no evidence to show that French loanwords had entered English before the Conquest. In addition, as observed by Alastair Campbell, 1959, that “.... even after 1066, French words flow into the literary move slowly than Norse ones, and they do not occur frequently until [after 1132]” (in Pyles, p295).

The influence of French on Old English is more observable upon vocabulary than any other aspects. This involved the major loss of Old English words and addition of Latin and French lexicon.

French was made the language of the official class during the Norman Conquest. Thus, words borrowed during this period were more associated with **government** and **administration**. Some examples of these words are the word *government* itself, *attorney*, *chancellor*, *court* and *crime*. The taking over of **churches** and **monasteries** had resulted the French words like *abbot*, *clergy*, *preach* and *sacrament* to emerge.

Since French was the language of the ruling class, words **designating the English titles of nobility** like *prince*, *duke*, *marquess*, *viscount* and *baron* were introduced into English during this period. Similarly, **military ranks** like *army*, *captain*, *corporal* and *lieutenant* as well as *soldiers* have French origin.

In addition, **animals served up as food** like *beef*, *mutton*, and *pork* were originally French names, not to mention the **culinary processes** like *broil*, *boil*, *fry*, *roast* and *stew*. There was also a variety of new words introduced by the upper class French in **domestic economy** and **social life** which include **fashion** and **dress**. Thus, words like *apparel*, *attire*, *lace* and *tafetta* were borrowed. Significantly, French loanwords also include the names of **precious stones** such as *turquoise*, *amethyst*, *topaz* and *pearl* to show the luxuries of the wealthy group.

Besides, the pouring in of words pertaining to the **arts, architecture, learning** and **medicine** denotes the ruling class' cultural and intellectual interests. Words like *arts, painting, sculpture, music, beauty* and *image* have coloured the English vocabulary through art while the same can be said for *cathedral, palace, mansion, chamber* and *pillar* for architecture. Interests in **literature** and **learning** are reflected on words like *poet, rime, prose* and *geometry*. The largest contribution of French is through medicine of which words like *physician, surgeon, malady* and *remedy* are still widely and commonly used.

From 1250 to 1400 the rate of the adoption of French words by English was the greatest. Statistically, during this period, 40% of all the French words in the English Language came in. The words were successfully assimilated and incorporated in the English Language. Even Chaucer, who prided himself in writing in English during the supremacy of French, actually used many French words in his written work. According to Serjeantson, 1935 (in Pyles, 1993), between ten to fifteen percent of the words used by Chaucer were of French origin.

Later borrowing of French words saw a number of **loan translations** such as *marriage of convenience* (marriage de convenance) and *that goes without saying* (ca va sans dire).

SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE LOANWORDS

Through cultural exchanges as a result of **trade, exploration** and **colonization**, the English-speaking people had formed a contact with continental Europeans. Thus, many non-European words came into English wordstock through Spanish and Portuguese during the Modern English period. Although Spanish words like *alligator, bonanza* and *canyon* are more familiar to American English than to British English, these words no doubt have enriched the English vocabulary. Other Portuguese words like *albino, bossanova, flamingo* and *lambada* also flow in.

ITALIAN LOANWORDS

Italian loanwords began to find their way into English during the sixteenth century. The **modern musical terminology** such as *violin*, *soprano*, *tempo* and *trombone* are Italian origin that are still in current use.

The popularity of Italian **food** has led to the borrowings of *macaroni*, *vermicelli*, *spaghetti* and *ravioli* as well as *lasagna*, *pizza* and *scampi*. Other Italian words include the **architectural** vocabulary such as *balcony*, *cupola* and words that are associated with **Cosa Nostra** and **mafioso** such as *mafia*, *bandit* and *vendetta*.

GERMAN LOANWORDS

Low German

The contribution of Dutch and other Low German words into English is due to the commercial relationships between English and the Dutch as well as Flemish-speaking people. The variety of cultural contacts between the English and the Dutch were reflected through the diversity of the loanwords. For example, through the **seafaring activities**, the Dutch words *like* *bowline*, *commodore*, *cruise* and *deck* have been adopted.

In addition, **cloth making terminology** like *jacket* and *spool* came into English along with the **commercial terms** like *dollar*, *guilder* and *mart* as a result of the cloth making trade of which the Dutch and Flemish were famous for.

Other loanwords were associated with **military** like *knapsack*, *onslaught* and *tatto*, **food and drinks** like *booze*, *brandy* and *gin*, as well as **art and painting** like *easel*, *landscape* and *sketch*.

High German

Compared to Low German, there is only a slight impact of High German on English. Most of the loanwords evolved around the **geological** and **mineralogical terminology** like *lawine* (avalanche), *loess*, *nickel*, *quarts* and *zinc*. Some **culinary terms** like *delicatessen*, *noodle*, *hamburger* and *frankfurter* were also the results of High German influence.

Some words did not enter into English from their original languages. For example, although *seminar* and *semester* are Latin words, they were brought into American English through German. In reverse, some German words were introduced into English through Yiddish. Words like *kibitzer*, *phooey* and *schmaltz* were evidenced to have been disseminated into English by Yiddish.

EASTERN LOANWORDS

Near East

Words like *ealfera* (pack horse) and *mancus* (coin) are evidence that Arabic words had entered English during the Old English period. Although these words did not survive, it is enough to show that the words were assimilated into English through commercial activities. During the Middle English period, a lot more Arabic words usually entered English through French and Latin. Words associated with **science** and **commerce** like *amber*, *cotton*, *mattress* and *sugar* are rightfully recognized as Arabic words. Some words like *coffee* which was ultimately Arabic were brought into English by Turkish. Nonetheless, regardless of the method of transmission, most words from Semitic languages were clear of their origin. For example, words like *amen*, *hallelujah*, *rabbi*, *Sabbath*, *Jehovah*, *Satan* and *kosher* were of Hebrew origin (although *kosher* was actually brought in by Yiddish).

Iran and India

Loanwords from Persian and Sanskrit were not borrowed directly. They entered into English in the Middle English period through Latin and Old French. From Persian the words *caravan* and *bazaar* were borrowed as well as *mogul*, *shah* and *shawl*. The word *chess*, which was from Old French, was actually ultimately Persian *check*. Meanwhile words like *karma*, *mahatma*, *swastika* and *yoga* were rightfully recognized from Sanskrit. In addition, the Old English *gingifere*, was actually from the Prakrit word, *ginger*. Words from Hindustani also found their way home in the English vocabulary. Examples of these are *bangle*, *bungalow*, *dinghy*, *dungaree*, *gunny*, *jungle*, *maharaja*, *maharani*, *pajamas*, *sari* and *babu*. Some Indic words like *pai*, were popular in English through literature work by Kipling, Scott, Byron and Thackeray.

Some words were transmitted indirectly from Tamil and Malay. Dravidian words, a non-Indo-European language, like *catamaran*, *copra*, *curry* and *pariah*, were introduced by Tamil, while *mango* came in by way of Malay.

Far East and Australasia

From the Far East and Australasia, some well known words that came into English were the results of **trade** and **colonialism**. Words like *silk*, varieties of tea like *bohea*, *oolong*, *pekoe* and *souchong*, along with *chop suey*, *chow* and *chow mien* are rightfully of Chinese origin.

From Japanese, the English vocabulary is coloured with *banzai*, *geisha*, *hara-kiri*, *karaoke*, *samurai* and *kamikaze*.

Through French, Portuguese, Dutch and Spanish, the Pacific Islands wordstock like *bamboo*, *gingham*, *launch* and *mangrove* was added into English. Polynesian *ukelele* and *luau* entered the English vocabulary through Hawaii. Our own Malaysian *rattan*, *kris*, *amok* and *kampung* also mark their place in English.

OTHER SOURCES OF LOANWORDS

African Languages

The loanwords from the African languages were imposed more on the American English rather than the British English as a result of **slavery** and **trade**. The majority of the words found their way into English through Portuguese and Spanish. Words like *banana*, *yam*, *voodoo*, *gorilla* and *jazz* were African and were noted in the American English. Ultimately from African languages, *samba* and *ramba* were brought in through Brazilian Portuguese and Cuban Spanish.

Slavic, Hungarian, Turkish and American Indian

English wordstock from Slavic, Hungarian, Turkish and American were recorded to have been borrowed since 1500 through other languages. *Sable*, which came in through French was actually a Slavic word. *Polka* was acquired from Czech while *mammoth* and *vodka* were directly from Russian. *Goulash* and *paprika* were Hungarian and Persian *jackal* was brought in by Turkish. Although the American Indian vocabulary does not really develop in American

English, words like *moccasin*, *squaw*, *toboggan* and *tomahawk*, along with *skunk*, *terrapin* and *woodchuck* survive and become popular.

CONCLUSION

History has shown that English is a living and growing language. Undoubtedly, it will continue to progress as it had been in the past. It is only natural that when countries engage in significant amount of commercial and cultural contact, they frequently borrow words from each other's language. The loanwords are assimilated and incorporated to the native language. This extensive and expansive borrowings from other culture has made what the English Language is today. In this retrospect The English Language, particularly its rich vocabulary, would not be significantly impoverished, extravagant nor cosmopolitan without its many addition from other languages. It is not impossible for our Bahasa Malaysia to have the global sway as English does. This is because, a lot of our own vocabulary are of foreign origins. Like English, we also borrowed extensively from other languages through commercial and cultural activities. If English receives many of its wordstock from the church, we also gain ours from Arabic through the Holy Quran.

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