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INFLUENCE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

English is a West Germanic language that originated from Anglo-Frisian dialects brought to Britain in the mid 5th to 7th centuries AD by Anglo-Saxon migrants from what is now northwest Germany, west Denmark and the Netherlands. The language has undergone major changes and developments in its pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and orthography throughout its over 1500 year history. This article provides an overview of the key influences and developments that have shaped the English language into its present global form. It examines the linguistic influences of Celtic, Norse, French, Latin, Greek and other languages on English. It also explores the impact of historical events, the growth of literacy, the invention of the printing press, dictionary compilation and standardized spelling on the development of English. The analysis shows that English has an unparalleled capacity to absorb, adapt and incorporate words and features from other languages. Through the early spread of English around the British Isles, and later via 19th and 20th century colonization and globalization, English has become the most widely spoken language worldwide with over 1.35 billion speakers.

KEYWORDS

English language, language development, linguistic influences, language history, lexicography.

INTRODUCTION

As a West Germanic language originating from the 5th century AD, English has undergone immense changes in all aspects over the past 1500 years, being influenced by the languages of invading and trading peoples and by advances in literacy, lexicography and printing. This

article provides an analysis of the key influences and developments that have shaped English into the global language it has become today. It examines the impact of historical movements of peoples who brought their languages and cultures to the British Isles, including

the Celtic tribes, Vikings from Scandinavian countries, the Norman French, as well as traces left by contact with classical languages like Latin and Greek. It explores how growing literacy, standardization of spelling, dictionary compilation, and the spread of English around the world through colonization and globalization led English to become one of the most widely-spoken and adapted languages globally, with over 1.35 billion speakers.

METHODS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This analysis involves a review of scholarly linguistic articles and academic histories tracing the development of English. Key sources examined include Baugh and Cable's "A History of the English Language", Crystal's "The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language", Barber's "The English Language: A Historical Introduction", Pyles and Algeo's "The Origins and Development of the English Language", Freeborn's "From Old English to Standard English" and Lerer's "Inventing English". Evidence from these texts along with bibliographies tracing the chronological development and change in English have enabled the compiling of this overview along with an assessment of the significance of external influences and pivotal events that have shaped the language over time.

RESULTS

The Celtic Influence: The Celts were the first tribal group encountered by early Anglo-Saxons arriving in 5th century Britain following the decline of Roman control in what became England. Research indicates that Celtic languages spoken by the British Celts at this time left little impression on Old English in its developmental Germanic stages [1]. However, Celtic influence strengthened after Norman conquests in the

11th-14th centuries brought English and Celtic-speaking peoples into renewed contact, with English absorbing more Celtic words and names, mainly from Welsh, Scottish and Irish Gaelic [2]. This is visible today in place names and terminology for geographic features across Britain like 'Avon' (river) and 'crag' (rocky cliff) [3].

The Scandinavian Influence: From the 8th to 11th centuries, Viking raids and subsequent Danish and Norse settlements introduced over 900 common Scandinavian terms into eastern and northern English dialects [4]. Words absorbed include everyday terms like 'egg', 'knife', 'sister' 'husband' and pronouns like 'they', 'them' and 'are' [5]. The north and east thus developed distinct lexicons blending Germanic words with Danish substitutes which gradually diffused south, although Norman occupations meant Scandinavian linguistic influence was weaker in the Midlands and absent in the far southwest [6].

The Norman Conquest: The 1066 CE Norman conquest of England by William the Conqueror was a watershed for English, introducing a three-century period where Anglo-Norman French and Normanized Latin were official languages while English was suppressed as a common vernacular [7]. French and Latin terminology permeated administrative, ecclesiastic, legal, military, and aristocratic circles, with English only remaining in common speech. This led to a dichotomy between official language and everyday tongue, with many Latin and French loan words entering the English lexicon [8]. Words borrowed include 'justice', 'parliament', 'prince'/'princess' (Norman French), and 'miniature', 'genius', 'species' (Latin). This period transformed English spelling and grammar and by Chaucer's time in the late 14th century, English had absorbed most Norman innovations [9].

Renaissance & Printing Press: The Renaissance and the 1454 CE advent of the German printing press in England coincided with the first standardized spellings and grammar rules [10]. William Caxton printed books in the London dialect using norms that set foundations for modern standardization [11]. Spread of the printing press enabled the first English monolingual dictionaries like Robert Cawdry's 'Table Alphabeticall' in 1604 CE which catalogued 3000 'hard usuall English wordes' [12], paving way for future lexicography. Renaissance revival of Greek scholarship also introduced hundreds of Greek words into English around this era [13].

Colonization & Global Spread: British colonialism spread English across the world between the 17th-20th centuries. In post-colonial times, American economic power and globalization saw English become the international language of business, commerce, communication and popular culture. These factors led English to extensively borrow words from Indian languages (pyjamas, bangle), Aboriginal Australian (kangaroo, koala), Caribbean Creoles (voodoo, zombie), Arabic (algebra, coffee), Malay (orang-utan) and Bantu (banana, impala) [14]. Loan words also entered from immigrant tongues as diverse groups settled colonies and Anglicized names and terms permeated English in the process [15]. Spread of American culture and media post-WW2 reignited borrowing, with American neologisms like 'teenager', 'software' and 'podcast' becoming ubiquitous. These conditions shaped modern English vocabulary and saw English grammar and expression assimilate global influences.

ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

As this review has shown, the development of English over 1500 years has been impacted by successive conquests and settlements that imported new lexicons, consecutive periods of cultural interchange that allowed loan words to enter common usage, advances in printing and literacy which enabled standardization, and ultimately the vast geographical spread of English speakers through imperialism and globalization who carried their own lexicons that continue shaping the language today. It reveals English has a unique capacity to absorb, adapt and incorporate foreign terminology on a scale unmatched by most languages.

The early influence of Celtic languages on English seems to have been quite minor, with more evidence of Celtic vocabulary apparent in place names across Britain rather than in widespread adopted words [3]. In contrast, the over 300-year occupation of England by Scandinavian and Norse settlers left a much more definitive impact on the language, particularly for northern dialects, with several hundred words of Danish/Norwegian origin becoming permanently adopted into the developing English lexicon [5]. Similarly, the Norman conquest of 1066 ushered in over two centuries of suppression of English by the Anglo-Norman nobility which saw French and Latin vocabulary heavily permeate language used by elite ruling classes. This in turn seeded hundreds of Latin and French loan words relating to law, government, military and clergy permanently into English as it later re-emerged in the late middle ages [9].

The rediscovery of classical Greek scholarship during the Renaissance also enabled another conduit for lexical expansion with suffixes and prefixes derived from Greek being increasingly used by scholars, clergy and scientists for word-building [13]. The advent of

printing and early English lexicography from the 17th century subsequently helped stabilize and standardize these accumulated lexical layers from successive conquests and exposure to foreign cultures while laying foundations for what is now recognized as Early Modern English [11][12].

It was globalization processes and the vast geographical spread of English through British colonialism across Asia, Africa, Australasia, North America and the Caribbean in the 18th-20th centuries however that has been the most revolutionary phase in reshaping English [14]. Thousands of loan words relating to trade, local flora and fauna, cuisine, topography as well as absorbed Anglicized names have entered common English usage from dozens of languages from these former colonies [15], with almost 40% of modern English vocabulary today having roots from external loan words or word-building approaches integrating foreign terminology.

This has given English the largest lexicon of all languages globally while debate continues whether these global influences may eventually lead English to fracture into distinct subforms. However, its current status as the uncontested language of global business, pop culture, commerce, diplomacy, and increasingly science, suggests lexical expansion and adaptation of international influences into World English may continue unabated for the near future at least.

Additionally, the global spread of American English through entertainment, media, and technology over the past century has introduced dozens of American neologisms into contemporary vocabulary and culture. Words like "computer", "software", "app", "email", "internet" and other modern technology terms were coined in American English from the mid-20th century

before being transmitted globally. As an early and prolific adopter of digital technology and computing advances, American English lexical innovations relating to computers and information technology have become ubiquitous in global English over the past 30 years. More recently, social media and smart devices have presented new conduits for predominantly American vocabulary additions like "tweet", "podcast", "selfie" and "emoji". As such, American English lexical expansion is today having a significant ongoing influence in disseminating neologisms relating to contemporary culture and digital technology into World English at a rapid pace.

CONCLUSION

This exploration reveals that external influences from successive invading and colonizing peoples over 1500 years from the 5th century CE onwards has presented English with repeated conduits for lexical and grammatical expansion. Each historical linguistic contact period introduced new words, altered spellings and pronunciations and reshaped grammatical conventions. The global spread of English through 20th century post-colonialism however has been the most impactful development, adding thousands of international loan words to its wordstock from former colonies while cementing its status as the world's global lingua franca.

Additionally, the rising dominance of American culture and media in the 20th and 21st century has established another portal for contemporary American neologisms relating to digital technology, online culture, entertainment and commerce to enter World English. This is likely to continue propelling further lexical evolution.

These conditions have led modern English to become one of the most eclectic composite languages with an unsurpassed ability to readily incorporate foreign features. Its lexical absorption of influences from Celtic, Norse, French, Greek, Latin, dozens of world languages via imperialism, and most recently American English, is unparalleled amongst global languages. Former predictions that global influences may fracture a unitary English have yet to eventuate. Instead, English has shown a capacity to expand definitions and modulate meaning to encompass plural global identities among second-language users, cementing its primacy as the definitive global lingua franca for the foreseeable future. This is set to present ongoing opportunities for versatile lexical borrowing and innovation.

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