

## **Early Modern English Period – 1500AD – 1800AD**

The English language entered the so-called 'Modern' phase around the 16th Century and, like all languages, is still changing. Some scholars would identify Modern English as starting with the introduction of printing. Caxton's selection of an East Midlands/London variety of English for the first printed books at the end of the 15th century contributed to the development of a standardised variety of the language, with fixed spelling and punctuation conventions and accepted vocabulary and grammatical forms. The perception of this standard variety as correct, 'good' English was also supported by attempts at codification, notably Johnson's dictionary and many prescriptive grammars of the 18th century. The vocabulary of English was consciously elaborated as it came to be used for an increasing variety of purposes, including translations of classical works rediscovered in the Renaissance, a burgeoning creative literature, and the description of new scientific activities. Thousands of words were borrowed from Latin and Greek in this period, such as education, metamorphosis, critic, conscious. The next wave of innovation in English came with the Renaissance. The revival of classical scholarship brought many classical Latin and Greek words into the Language. These borrowings were deliberate and many bemoaned the adoption of these ink horn terms, but many survive to this day. Examples of characteristic inkhorn words include: ingent, devulgate, attemptate, obtestate, fatigue, deruncinate and subsecive. Shakespeare's character Holofernes in *Loves Labor Lost* is a satire of an over enthusiastic schoolmaster who is too fond of Latinisms. Since the 16th Century, because of the contact that the British had with many peoples from around the world, and the Renaissance of Classical learning, many words have entered the language either directly or indirectly. New words were created at an increasing rate. This process has grown exponentially in the modern era. The early Modern English period could also be called the golden age of English Writing. Two particularly influential milestones in English literature were published in the 16th and early 17th Century. In 1549, the "Book of Common Prayer" (a translation of the Church liturgy in English, substantially

revised in 1662) was introduced into English churches, followed in 1611 by the Authorized, or King James, Version of "The Bible", the culmination of more than two centuries of efforts to produce a Bible in the native language of the people of England. Up until the 17th Century, English was rarely used for scholarly or scientific works, as it was not considered to possess the precision or the gravitas of Latin or French. Thomas More, Isaac Newton, William Harvey and many other English scholars all wrote their works in Latin and, even in the 18th Century, Edward Gibbon wrote his major works in French, and only then translated them into English. Over time, the rise of nationalism led to the increased use of the native spoken language rather than Latin, even as the medium of intellectual communication.

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The English scholar and classicist Sir Thomas Elyot went out of his way to find new words, and gave the English language words like animate, describe, dedicate, esteem, maturity, exhaust and modesty in the early 16th Century. Sir Thomas More contributed absurdity, active, communicate, education, utopia, acceptance, exact, explain, exaggerate and others, largely from Latin roots. Ben Jonson, a contemporary of Shakespeare, is also credited with the introduction of many common words, including damp, defunct, strenuous, clumsy and others, and to Sir Philip Sidney are attributed bugbear, miniature, eye-pleasing, dumb-stricken, far-fetched and conversation in its modern meaning. Poetry became the proving ground for several generations of English writers during a golden age of English literature, and Edmund Spenser, John Donne, John Milton, John Dryden, Andrew Marvell, Alexander Pope and many other rose to the challenge. Important English playwrights of the Elizabethan era include Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, John Webster and of course Shakespeare. It is clear that one man, William Shakespeare, single-handedly changed the English language to a significant extent in the late 16th and early 17th Century. Taking advantage of the

relative freedom and flexibility of English at the time, he played with liberal prevalent grammatical rules, even using nouns as verbs and adjectives in phrases such as “he pageants us” and “dog them at the heels”. He had a vast vocabulary (34,000 words by some counts) and he personally coined an estimated 2,000 new words in his many works, including bare-faced, critical, leapfrog, monumental, castigate, majestic and obscene. However, not all of his ‘new words’ were personally invented by Shakespeare himself: they merely appear for the first time in his published works, and were variously sourced including from local dialects. He also introduced countless phrases in common use today, such as one fell swoop, vanish into thin air, brave new world, in my mind’s eye, laughing stock, love is blind, a foregone conclusion, beggars all description, it’s Greek to me, a tower of strength and brevity is the soul of wit among many others. Another major factor that influenced the language and served to separate Middle and Modern English was the continual effect of the Great Vowel Shift, even though its roots are seen as far back as 1400. While modern English speakers can read Chaucer with some difficulty, Chaucer’s pronunciation would have been completely unintelligible to the modern ear. Shakespeare, on the other hand, would be accented, but understandable. Long vowel sounds began to be made higher in the mouth and the letter e at the end of words became silent. Chaucer’s Lyf (pronounced /leef/) became the modern word life. In Middle English name was pronounced /nam-a/, five was pronounced /feef/, and down was pronounced /doon/. In linguistic terms, the shift was rather sudden, the major changes occurring within a century. It is interesting that the ‘shift’ is still not over, however, vowel sounds are still shortening, although the change has become considerably more gradual. The advent of the printing press played a defining role in the development of Modern English, when William Caxton brought the printing press to England in 1476. Books became cheaper and as a result, literacy became more common. Publishing for the masses became a profitable enterprise, and works in English, as

opposed to Latin, became more common. Finally, the printing press brought standardization to English. The dialect of London, where most publishing houses were located, became the standard. Caxton and printers who succeeded him played a major role in the orthography of early Modern English. The invention of printing also meant that there was now a common language in print. Books became cheaper and more people learned to read. For example, with regard to the *the* and *thee*, early printed books sometimes used *y* to represent the sounds usually spelled *th*. This substitution was made because the letter *p* was still much used in English manuscripts, but the early printers got their type fonts from the Continent, where the letter *p* was not normal. So they substituted for *p* the closest thing they found in the foreign fonts, namely *y*.

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Yet printing ensured that standardization was applied to English, and spelling and grammar became fixed. The first English dictionary was published in 1604, and the dialect of London, where most publishing houses were, became the standard. The so-called 'orthoepists' were largely self-appointed guardians of the language in these seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They took it upon themselves to direct and guide orthographical changes in the spelling and pronunciation of early modern English, though the grounds for their directives were often flimsy and sometimes whimsical. Thomas Sheridan, in his *General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780) decides in favor of the *l*-less pronunciation of *fault*. Robert Nares wrote *Elements of Orthoëpy* (1784) and John Walker produced his *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791). The underlying motivation of these experts was often a desire to ensure that modern English words remained true to their Latin origins. So, for example, *debt* and *doubt* are fancy etymological respellings of Old English *det* and *dout*, the *b* having been inserted because it was perceived that these words were ultimately derivatives of Latin *debitum* and *dubitare*, respectively. However, such modifications of orthography have caused discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation in Modern English.

## **Syntax and usage**

The establishment of the standard written language of Modern English was necessitated by central government for regular procedures including record keeping and communication with the citizens of the land. The Chancery of Westminster made some efforts from the 1430s onwards to set standard spellings for official documents, specifying I instead of ich and various other common variants of the first person pronoun, land instead of lond, and modern spellings of such, right, not, but, these, any, many, can, cannot, but, shall, should, could, ought, thorough, etc, all of which previously appeared in many variants. Chancery Standard contributed significantly to the development of a Standard English, and the political, commercial and cultural dominance of the London-Oxford-Cambridge triangle was well established long before the 15th Century. With the advent of mass printing, the dialect and spelling of the East Midlands (and, more specifically, that of the national capital, London, where most publishing houses were located) became the de facto standard and, over time, spelling and grammar gradually became more and more fixed. The first English dictionary, "A Table Alphabeticall", was published by English school teacher Robert Cawdrey in 1604, eight years before the first Italian dictionary but possibly some thousand years after the first Sanskrit dictionary). Cawdrey's little book contained 2,543 of what he called "hard words", especially those borrowed from Hebrew, Greek, Latin and French. Several other dictionaries, as well as grammar, pronunciation and spelling guides, followed during the 17th and 18th Century. The first attempt to list all the words in the English language was "An Universall Etymological English Dictionary", compiled by Nathaniel Bailey in 1721, with its 1736 edition contained about 60,000 entries. However, the earliest reliable dictionary Samuel Johnson's "Dictionary of the English Language", published in 1755, over 150 years after Cawdrey's. An impressive academic achievement in its own right, Johnson's 43,000 word dictionary remained the pre-eminent English dictionary until the much more comprehensive "Oxford English Dictionary" 150 more years later. In the wake of Johnson's "Dictionary", many more dictionaries and glossaries

appeared, including Thomas Sheridan's book "British Education", an attempt to regulate English pronunciation as well as its vocabulary and spelling. In addition to dictionaries, many English grammars started to appear in the 18th Century, the best-known and most influential of which were Robert Lowth's "A Short Introduction to English Grammar" (1762) and Lindley Murray's "English Grammar" (1794). In fact, some 200 works on grammar and rhetoric were published between 1750 and 1800, and no less than 800 during the 19th Century. Most of these works, Lowth's in particular, were extremely prescriptive, stating in no uncertain terms the "correct" way of using English. Lowth was the main source of such "correct" grammar rules as a double negative always yields a positive, never end a sentence with a preposition and never split an infinitive. A product of the scientific age, Lowth believed that English was "easily reducible to a system of rules." A refreshing exception to such prescriptivism was the "Rudiments of English Grammar" by the scientist and polymath Joseph Priestley, which was unusual in expressing the view that grammar is defined by common usage and not prescribed by self-styled grammarians. While all these important developments were underway, British naval superiority was also growing. In the 16th and 17th Century, international trade expanded immensely, and loan words were absorbed from the languages of many other countries throughout the world, including those of other trading and imperial nations such as Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands. Among these were: French (e.g. bizarre, ballet, sachet, crew, progress, chocolate, salon, brigade, passport, explorer, ticket, machine, cuisine, prestige, vogue)

Italian (e.g. carnival, fiasco, arsenal, casino, miniature, design, bankrupt, grotto, studio, umbrella, balcony, macaroni, piano, opera, violin); Spanish (e.g. armada, bravado, cork, barricade, cannibal); Portuguese (e.g. breeze, tank, marmalade, molasses); German (e.g. kindergarten, noodle, bum, dumb, dollar, muffin, wanderlust, gimmick, waltz, seminar); Dutch/Flemish (e.g. spool, skipper, dam, curl, scum, sketch, landscape, smuggle, yacht, cruise, dock, freight, leak, snoop, spook, brick, pump,

boss,); Norwegian (e.g. maelstrom, iceberg, ski, troll); Icelandic (e.g. mumps, saga, geyser); Finnish (e.g. sauna); Persian (e.g. shawl, lemon, caravan, bazaar, tambourine); Arabic (e.g. harem, jar, magazine, algebra, algorithm, almanac, alchemy, zenith, admiral, sherbet, saffron, coffee, alcohol, mattress, syrup, hazard, lute); Turkish (e.g. coffee, yoghurt, caviar, horde, chess, kiosk, tulip, turban); Russian (e.g. sable); Japanese (e.g. tycoon, geisha, karate, samurai); Malay (e.g. bamboo, amok, caddy, gong, ketchup); Chinese (e.g. tea, typhoon, kowtow). Polynesian (e.g. taboo). Even with all these borrowings the heart of the language remains the Anglo-Saxon of Old English. Only about 5000 or so words from this period have remained unchanged but they include the basic building blocks of the language: household words, parts of the body, common animals, natural elements, most pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions and auxiliary verbs. Grafted onto this basic stock was a wealth of contributions to produce, what many people believe, is the richest of the world's languages. By the end of the 16th Century, English had finally become widely accepted as a language of learning, equal if not superior to the classical languages. Vernacular language, once scorned as suitable for popular literature and little else - and still criticized throughout much of Europe as crude, limited and immature - had become the 'standard of Shakespeare', with rich inherent qualities.

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## **Late Modern English - 1800-Present**

One clear distinction that becomes immediately obvious as one compares early-modern English and late-modern English is the huge increase in vocabulary as one moves from the former to the latter. While basic pronunciation and grammar are recognizably similar, late-modern English has a humongous vocabulary, easily the largest of any world language. Two historical factors are known to have contributed to this. The first is the Industrial Revolution and the consequent rise of the technological society. This necessitated new words for things and ideas that had not previously existed. The second was the British Empire. At its height, Britain ruled one quarter of the earth's surface, and English traveled to many nations, adopting

many foreign words and making them her own. The industrial and scientific revolutions created a need for neologisms to describe new discoveries and creations. For this, English relied heavily on Latin and Greek. Words like oxygen, protein, nuclear, and vaccine did not exist in the classical languages, but they were created from Latin and Greek roots. Some neologisms were created from English roots too, producing such terms as horsepower, airplane, and typewriter. This steady stream of neologisms continues today, perhaps most visible in the field of electronics and computers. Android, megabytes, hard-drive, and microchip are examples of technological words that have made their way into common parlance. 'The sun never sets on the British Empire', it was claimed and quite rightly so as the home nation of English controlled large swathes of the world map. The governance of these lands and the ensuing global trade that came out of it introduced English to the world. Simultaneously, words from across the world made their way into the English language. Virtually every language on Earth has contributed to the development of English, from the Finnish sauna and the Japanese tycoon, to the Indian jungle and Arabian sherbet. From around 1600, the English colonization of North America resulted in the creation of a distinct American variety of English. British English has been considered the prestigious national variety as compared to its younger counterpart across the Atlantic ocean, American English. The former assumed greatness due to the weight of its literary heritage, Shakespeare et al and also its status as the language of the Empire. British English also seems to demand importance because of its so called purity, a notion that Algeo dismisses as 'baseless'

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. American English, the only other national variety of the language is far more popular, given its influence as exerted in spheres as diverse as popular music and scientific journals. Indeed, it is possible to identify a linguistic conservatism in American English that is greater than that of British English. Some English pronunciations and words "froze" when they reached America. In some ways, American English is more like the English of Shakespeare than modern British English is. Whether in pronunciation or grammar, the version of English now



spoken in America has retained numerous characteristics of earlier English that have not survived in contemporary British English. For example, British English only uses the word 'gotten' in the phrase "ill-gotten gains", but American English continues to use gotten in normal parlance as the past participial form of the verb ("I've gotten a tummy upset each time I eat at McDonalds"). Similarly, earlier British English used the word 'fall' but now uses 'autumn'; American English has retained the use of 'fall'. American English had to cope with the new conditions facing the descendants of the colonists who first crossed the Atlantic from Britain. British vocabulary had topographical terms that were not needed in America (heath and moor, for example). On the other hand, new words had to be coined to name new geographical features such as 'canyon', taken from the Spanish canon, meaning tube. Similar challenges were faced when they came across flora and fauna that were unfamiliar. At such times, a popular method used was to enquire and use the name given to it by the local Indians. The American raccoon is so named after its Indian name, since such a creature does not exist in Britain. Thus, the American dialect also served as the route of introduction for many native American words into the English language. Most often, these were place names like Mississippi and Iowa. Spanish has also been a great influence on American English. Mustang, canyon, ranch, stampede, and vigilante are all examples of Spanish words that made their way into English through the settlement of the American West. Differences and variations between British and American national varieties of English can be observed in word choice, pronunciation, intonation and spelling. American and British Englishes use different words for the same thing; one of the best examples of this is the terminology used for automobiles. American English calls hood what British English calls the car bonnet. The British car boot is the trunk in American English. The British lorry is called a truck in American English. One of the basic differences between the British and the American pronunciation is the treatment

of /r/. British English is non-rhotic, whereas the American accent is rhotic (r is pronounced when found in spelling). British speakers of English use the /ɑ:/ sound (i.e. clahs, grahs, pahth) for class, grass, path. Americans, on the other hand, use the “short a” /æ/ sound. Another characteristic very common in American English, and not commonly seen in British English, is nasalisation, a nasal quality given to vowel sounds preceding a nasal consonant (mainly m, n or ŋ), producing a ‘nasal twang’. Thus, the word can’t / kɑ:nt / becomes / kʔ(n)t / in American English pronunciation. The difference in word stress between the two Englishes can generally be seen in relatively long words. For example, the word cigarette would be stressed thusly in British English: ciga’rette, whereas the American equivalent would have so much stress at all. Finally, some general differences between British and American spellings are obvious: Words ending in -or in American English are seen ending with -our in British spellings.

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So: color / colour, humor / humour, flavor / flavour. Another group of words that change are words ending in -ize (American) -ise (British): recognize / recognise, patronize / patronise. While the erstwhile British Empire is history today, English is spoken by two of the world’s seven billion people. Braj Kachru, Professor Emeritus at University of Illinois, explains the spread of English around the world in terms of three concentric circles. The Inner Circle (at the centre), represents the countries where English is the primary language and it includes the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. These countries are said to represent what is called native speakers of English. He also refers to them as ‘norm-providing’ countries since the norms of English use are derived from them. The second circle, which is called the Outer Circle, represents countries where English is one of two or more official languages and used in a variety of functions. Examples of

such countries are mainly former colonies of Britain such as India, Malaysia, Pakistan, South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana. Kachru calls such countries 'norm-developing' countries since they are developing their own varieties. Some examples for such category are Singaporean English and Indian English. The third circle, which is called the Expanding Circle, includes countries where English is used as an international language like, China, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan and Zimbabwe. These countries, according to Kachru, are 'norm-dependent' as they are not developing their own varieties of English. Over the last four hundred years the English language has spread all over the globe and has developed a wide range of regional, social, and stylistic varieties. In the Postcolonial era it has become rooted and acquired new forms and functions, in contact with indigenous languages and cultures, in America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and Australasia. This has resulted in the creation of other varieties of English around the world, including for example Canadian English, South African English and Indian English. Yet, given its key function as an international medium of communication, all dialects of English share a common core, usually called an international standard of English.

### **Indian English**

English has been with India since the early 1600's, when the East India Company started trading and English missionaries first began their efforts. A large number of Christian schools imparting an English education were set up by the early 1800's. The process of producing English-knowing bilinguals in India began with the Minute of 1835, which officially endorsed T.B. Macaulay's goal of forming "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern - a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect". English became the official and academic language of India by the early twentieth century.

Only about three percent of India's population speaks English, but they are the individuals who lead India's economic, industrial,

professional, political, and social life. Even though English is primarily a second language for these persons, it is the medium in which a great number of the interactions in the above domains are carried out. Despite being a three percent minority, the English speaking population in India is quite large. With India's massive population, that three percent puts India among the top four countries in the world with the highest number of English speakers. English confers many advantages to the influential people who speak it -- which has allowed it to retain its prominence despite the strong opposition to English which rises periodically from supposedly nationalistic philosophies.