



# Introduction

My name is Alexandra Horba and I'm in the first year of Experimental Senior-High School in Patras, Greece.

In the school year 2016-2017, I wrote this paper as a project for the English course.

The purpose of this project was to give me a chance to get to know the history of the English language, to learn about its origins and to understand how it transformed in the way we know it today.

For this project I worked at home, using the Internet in order to collect information about the English language and its history.

## Preview of the English-Language History

English is a West Germanic language that originated from Anglo-Frisian dialects brought to Britain in the mid- 5th to 7th centuries AD, by Germanic invaders and settlers, from the area that is now northwest Germany, west Denmark and the Netherlands.

The Old English of the Anglo-Saxon era developed into Middle English, the language spoken between the Norman Conquest and the late 15th century. A significant influence on the shaping of Middle English came from the contact with the North-Germanic languages spoken by the Scandinavians who conquered and colonized parts of Britain during the 8th and 9th centuries; this contact led to much lexical borrowing and grammatical simplification.

Another important influence came from the conquering Normans, who spoke a form of French called Old Norman, which in Britain developed into Anglo-Norman. Many Norman and French loanwords entered the language in this period, especially in vocabulary related to the church, the court system and the government. The system of orthography that became established during the Middle English period is by and large still in use today – later changes in pronunciation, however, combined with the adoption of various foreign spellings, mean that the spelling of modern English words appears highly irregular.

Early Modern English – the language used by Shakespeare – is dated from around 1500. It incorporated many Renaissance-era loans from Latin and Ancient Greek, as well as borrowings from other European languages, including French, German and Dutch. Significant pronunciation changes in this period included the ongoing Great Vowel Shift, which affected the qualities of most long vowels.

Modern English proper, similar in most respects to that spoken today, was in place by the late 17th century. The English language came to be exported to other parts of the world through British colonization, and is now the dominant language in Britain and Ireland, the United States and Canada, Australia, New Zealand and many smaller former colonies, as well as being widely spoken in India, parts of Africa, and elsewhere. Partially due to the influence of the United States, English gradually took on the status of a *global, lingua franca* in the second half of 20th century. This is especially true in Europe, where English has largely taken over the former roles of French and (much earlier) Latin as a common language used to conduct business and diplomacy, share scientific and technological information, and otherwise communicate across national boundaries.

Old English consisted of a diverse group of dialects, reflecting the varied origins of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms established in different parts of Britain. The Late West Saxon dialect eventually became dominant; however, a greater input to Middle English came from the Anglian dialects. **Global geographic variation between different English dialects and accents remains significant today.** *Scots*, a form of English traditionally spoken in parts of Scotland and the north of Ireland, is often regarded as a separate language.

## PROTO ENGLISH

English has its roots in the languages of the Germanic peoples of northern Europe.

During the Roman Empire, most of the Germanic-inhabited area (Germania) remained independent from Rome, although some southwestern parts were within the empire. Some Germanics served in the Roman military, and troops from Germanic tribes such as the Tongri, Batavia, Menapii and Frisian served in Britain (Britannia) under Roman command. Germanic settlement and power expanded during the Migration Period, which saw the fall of the Western Roman Empire. The Germanic settlement of Britain took place from the 5th to the 7th century, following the end of Roman rule on the island. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle relates that around the year

449, Vortigern, King of the Britons, invited the "Angle kin" (Angles allegedly led by the Germanic brothers Hengist and Horsa) to help repel invading Picts, in return for lands in the southeast of Britain. This led to waves of settlers who eventually established seven kingdoms, known as the heptarchy. (The Chronicle was not a contemporaneous work, however, and cannot be regarded as an accurate record of such early events.) Bede, who wrote his Ecclesiastical History in AD 731, writes of invasion by Angles, Saxons and Jutes, although the precise nature of the invasion and settlement and the contributions made by these particular groups are the subject of much dispute among historians.

The languages spoken by the Germanic peoples who initially settled in Britain were part of the West Germanic branch of the Germanic language family. They consisted of dialects from the Ingvaemonic grouping, spoken mainly around the North Sea coast, in regions that lie within modern Denmark, north-west Germany and the Netherlands. Due to specific similarities between early English and Old Frisian, an Anglo-Frisian grouping is also identified. These dialects had most of the typical West Germanic features, including a significant amount of grammatical inflection. Vocabulary came largely from the core Germanic stock, although due to the Germanic peoples' extensive contacts with the Roman world, the settlers' languages already included a number of loanwords from Latin. For instance, the predecessor of the Modern-English word "wine" had been borrowed into early Germanic from the Latin word "vinum".

## OLD ENGLISH

The dialects spoken by the Germanic settlers developed into a language that would come to be called *Anglo-Saxon*, or now more commonly *Old English*. It displaced the indigenous Brittonic Celtic (and the Latin of the former Roman rulers) in most of the areas of Britain that later formed the Kingdom of England, while Celtic languages remained in most of Scotland, Wales and Cornwall, and many compound Celtic-Germanic placenames survive, hinting at early language mixing. Old English continued to exhibit local variation, the remnants of which continue to be found in dialects of Modern English. The four main dialects were **Mercian**, **Northumbrian**, **Kentish** and **West Saxon**; the last of these formed the basis for the literary standard of the later Old English period, although the dominant forms of Middle and Modern English would develop mainly from Mercian.

Old English was first written using a runic script called the futhorc, but this was replaced by a version of the Latin alphabet introduced by Irish missionaries in the 9th century. Most literary output was in either the Early West Saxon of Alfred the Great's time, or the Late West Saxon (regarded as the "classical" form of Old English) of the Winchester school inspired by Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester and followed by such writers as the prolific Ælfric of Eynsham ("the Grammarian"). The most famous surviving work from the Old English period is the epic poem *Beowulf*, composed by an unknown poet.

The introduction of Christianity from around the year 600 encouraged the addition of over 400 Latin loan words into Old English, such as the predecessors of the modern priest, paper, and school, and a smaller number of Greek loan words. The speech of eastern and northern parts of England was also subject to strong Old Norse influence due to Scandinavian rule and settlement beginning in the 9th century.

Most native English speakers today find Old English unintelligible, even though about half of the most commonly used words in Modern English have Old English roots. The grammar of Old English was much more inflected than modern English, combined with freer word order, and was grammatically quite similar in some respects to modern German. The Old English period is considered to have transitioned into the Middle English period sometime after the Norman conquest of 1066, when the language came to be influenced significantly by the new ruling class's French dialect, called Old Norman.

## SCANDINAVIAN INFLUENCE

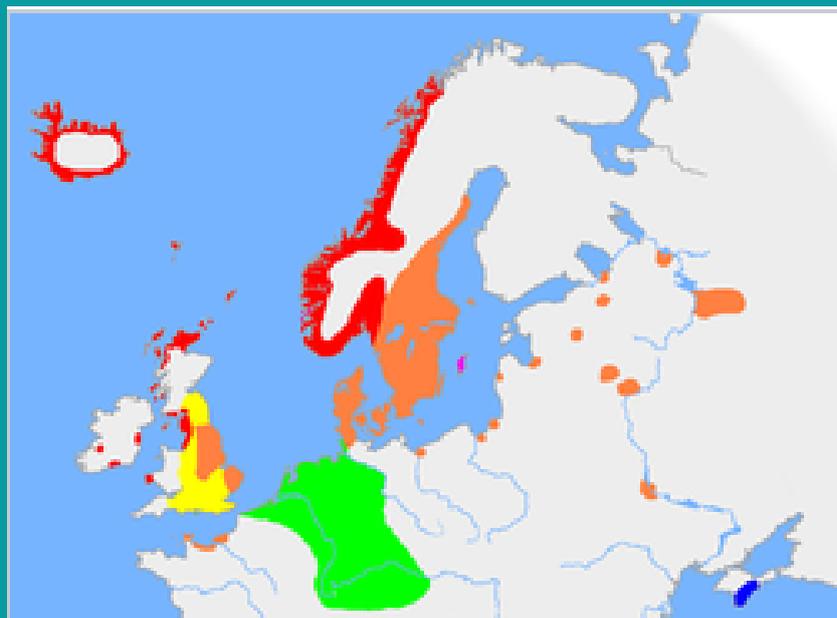
The Vikings from modern-day Norway and Denmark began to raid parts of Britain from the late 8th century onward. In 865, however, a major invasion was launched by what the Anglo-Saxons called the Great Heathen Army, which eventually brought large parts of northern and eastern England (the Danelaw) under Scandinavian control. Most of these areas were retaken by the English, under Edward the Elder in the early 10th century, although York and Northumbria were not permanently regained until the death of Eric Bloodaxe in 954. Scandinavian raids resumed in the late 10th century during the reign of Æthelred the Unready, and Sweyn Forkbeard eventually succeeded in briefly being declared king of England in

1013, followed by the longer reign of his son, Cnut from 1016 to 1035, and Cnut's sons, Harold Harefoot and Harthacnut until 1042.

The Scandinavians, or Norsemen, spoke dialects of a North Germanic language known as *Old Norse*. The Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians thus spoke related languages from different branches (West and North) of the Germanic family; many of their lexical roots were the same or similar, although their grammatical systems were more divergent. Probably significant numbers of Norse speakers settled in the Danelaw during the period of Scandinavian control. Many place-names in those areas are of Scandinavian provenance (those ending in -by, for example); it is believed that the settlers often established new communities in places that had not previously been developed by the Anglo-Saxons. The extensive contact between Old English and Old Norse speakers, including the possibility of intermarriage that resulted from the acceptance of Christianity by the Danes in 878, undoubtedly influenced the varieties of those languages spoken in the areas of contact. Some scholars even believe that Old English and Old Norse underwent a kind of fusion, and that the resulting English language might be described as a **mixed language** or **creole**. During the rule of Cnut and other Danish kings in the first half of the 11th century a kind of diglossia may have come about, with the West Saxon literary language existing alongside the Norse-influenced Midland dialect of English, which could have served as a koine or spoken *lingua franca*. When Danish rule ended, and particularly after the Norman Conquest, the status of the minority Norse language presumably declined relative to that of English, and its remaining speakers assimilated to English in a process involving *language shift* and *language death*. The widespread bilingualism that must have existed during this process possibly contributed to the rate of borrowings from Norse into English. Only about 100 or 150 Norse words, mainly connected with government and administration, are found in Old English writing. The borrowing of words of this type was stimulated by Scandinavian rule in the Danelaw and during the later reign of Cnut. However, most surviving Old English texts are based on the West Saxon standard that developed outside the Danelaw; it is not clear to what extent Norse influenced the forms of the language spoken in eastern and northern England at that time.

Later texts from the Middle English era, now based on an eastern Midland rather than a Wessex standard, reflect the significant impact that Norse had on the language. In all, English borrowed about two thousand words from Old Norse, of which several hundred survive in Modern English. Norse borrowings include many very common words, such as *anger*, *bag*, *both*, *hit*, *law*, *leg*, *same*, *skill*, *sky*, *take*, *window*, and even the pronoun *they*. Norse influence is also believed to have

reinforced the adoption of the plural copular verb form *are* rather than alternative Old English forms like *sind*. It is also considered to have stimulated and accelerated the morphological simplification found in Middle English, such as the loss of grammatical gender and explicitly marked case (except in pronouns). This is possibly confirmed by observations that simplification of the case endings occurred earliest in the north and latest in the south-west, the area farthest away from Viking influence. The spread of phrasal verbs in English is another grammatical development to which Norse may have contributed (although here a possible Celtic influence is also noted).



The approximate extent of Old Norse and related languages in the early 10th century: 

-  Old West Norse dialect
-  Old East Norse dialect
-  Old Gutnish
-  Old English
-  Crimean Gothic
-  Other Germanic languages with which

Old Norse still retained some mutual intelligibility

# MIDDLE ENGLISH

Middle English is the form of English spoken roughly from the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066 until the end of the 15th century. For centuries after the Conquest, the Norman kings and high-ranking nobles in England and to some extent elsewhere in the British Isles spoke Anglo-Norman, a variety of Old Norman, originating from a northern langue *d'oïl* dialect. Merchants and lower-ranked nobles were often bilingual in Anglo-Norman and English, whilst English continued to be the language of the common people. Middle English was influenced by both Anglo-Norman, and later Anglo-French.

Until the 14th century, Anglo-Norman and then French were the language of the courts and government. Even after the decline of Norman French, standard French retained the status of a formal or prestige language, and about 10,000 French (and Norman) loan words entered Middle English, particularly terms associated with government, church, law, the military, fashion, and food. The strong influence of Old Norse on English (described in the previous section) also becomes apparent during this period. The impact of the native British Celtic languages that English continued to displace is generally held to be much smaller, although some attribute such analytic verb forms as the continuous aspect ("to be doing" or "to have been doing") to Celtic influence. Some scholars have also put forward hypotheses that Middle English was **a kind of creole language** resulting from contact between Old English and either Old Norse or Anglo-Norman.

English literature began to reappear after 1200, when a changing political climate and the decline in Anglo-Norman made it more respectable. *The Provisions of Oxford*, released in 1258, was the first English government document to be published in the English language after the Norman Conquest. In 1362, Edward III became the first king to address Parliament in English. The Pleading in English Act 1362 made English the only language in which court proceedings could be held, though the official record remained in Latin. By the end of the century, even the royal court had switched to English. Anglo-Norman remained in use in limited circles somewhat longer, but it had ceased to be a living language. Official documents began to be produced regularly in English during the 15th century. **Geoffrey Chaucer**, who lived in the late 14th century, is the most famous writer from the Middle English period, and *The Canterbury Tales* is his best-known work. The English language changed enormously during the Middle English period, both in vocabulary and pronunciation, and in grammar. While Old English is a heavily inflected language

(synthetic), the use of grammatical endings diminished in Middle English (analytic). Grammar distinctions were lost as many noun and adjective endings were levelled to -e. The older plural noun marker -en (retained in a few cases such as children and oxen) largely gave way to -s, and grammatical gender was discarded. English spelling was also influenced by Norman in this period, with the /θ/ and /ð/ sounds being spelled th rather than with the Old English letters þ (thorn) and ð (eth), which did not exist in Norman. These letters remain in the modern Icelandic and Faroese alphabets, having been borrowed from Old English via Old West Norse.

## EARLY MODERN ENGLISH

English underwent extensive sound changes during the 15th century, while its spelling conventions remained largely constant. Modern English is often dated from the Great Vowel Shift, which took place mainly during the 15th century. The language was further transformed by the spread of a standardized London-based dialect in government and administration and by the standardizing effect of printing. As a result, the language acquired self-conscious terms such as "accent" and "dialect".

By the time of William Shakespeare (mid 16th - early 17th century), the language had become clearly recognisable as Modern English. In 1604, the first English dictionary was published, the *Table Alphabetical*. Increased literacy and travel facilitated the adoption of many foreign words, especially borrowings from Latin and Greek from the time of the Renaissance. In the 17th century, Latin words were often used with their original inflections, but these eventually disappeared. As there are many words from different languages and English spelling is variable, the risk of mispronunciation is high, but remnants of the older forms remain in a few regional dialects, most notably in the West Country. During the period, loan words were borrowed from Italian, German, and Yiddish. British acceptance of and resistance to Americanisms began during this period.

# MODERN ENGLISH

The first authoritative and full featured English dictionary, the *Dictionary of the English Language*, was published by **Samuel Johnson** in 1755. To a high degree, the dictionary standardized both English spelling and word usage. Meanwhile, grammar texts by **Lowth, Murray, Priestly**, and others attempted to prescribe standard usage even further.

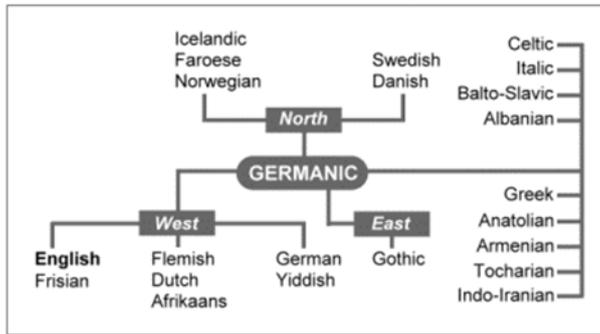
Early Modern English and Late Modern English differ essentially in vocabulary. Late Modern English has many more words, arising from the Industrial Revolution and technology that created a need for new words, as well as international development of the language. The British Empire at its height covered one quarter of the Earth's surface, and the English language adopted foreign words from many countries. **British English** and **North American English**, the two major varieties of the language, are together spoken by 400 million people. *Received Pronunciation of British English* is considered the traditional standard. The total number of English speakers worldwide may exceed one billion. The English language will almost certainly continue to evolve over time. With the development of computer use (chat rooms, domains, and apps, etc.), and the adoption of **English as a worldwide lingua franca across cultures, customs, and traditions**, we should not be surprised to see some further shortening of words, phrases, and/or sentences.

A brief chronology of English		
55 BC	Roman invasion of Britain by Julius Caesar	Local inhabitants speak Celtic
AD 43	Roman invasion and occupation. Beginning of Roman rule of Britain	
436	Roman withdrawal from Britain complete	
449	Settlement of Britain by Germanic invaders begins	
450-480	Earliest known Old English inscriptions	Old English
1066	William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, invades and conquers England	
c1150	Earliest surviving manuscripts in Middle English	Middle English
1348	English replaces Latin as the language of instruction in most schools	

1702	The first daily English-language newspaper, <i>The Daily Courant</i> , is published in London	
1755	Samuel Johnson publishes his English dictionary	
1776	Thomas Jefferson writes the American Declaration of Independence	
1782	Britain abandons its colonies in what is later to become the USA	
1828	Webster publishes his American English dictionary	Late Modern English
1922	The British Broadcasting Corporation is founded	
1928	The <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> is published	

1348	English replaces Latin as the language of instruction in most schools	
1362	English replaces French as the language of law. English is used in Parliament for the first time	
c1388	Chaucer starts writing <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>	
c1400	The Great Vowel Shift begins	
1476	William Caxton establishes the first English printing press	Early Modern English
1564	Shakespeare is born	
1604	<i>Table Alphabeticall</i> , the first English dictionary, is published	
1607	The first permanent English settlement in the New World (Jamestown) is established	
1616	Shakespeare dies	
1623	Shakespeare's First Folio is published	

## The Germanic Family of Languages



English is a member of the Germanic family of languages. Germanic is a branch of the Indo-European language family.

## Conclusion

This project helped me to become informed of the history of the English language and to understand all the “changes” that evolved in this language during the centuries that transformed it in the way we know it today.

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