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Synopsis

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ETYMOLOGY OF ENGLISH LEXICOLOGY

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Survey of certain historical facts

It is true that English vocabulary, which is one of the most extensive among the world's languages contains an immense number of words of foreign origin. Explanations for this should be sought in the history of the language which is closely connected with the history of the nation speaking the language.

The first century B. C. Most of the territory now known to us as Europe was occupied by the Roman Empire. Among the inhabitants of the Europe are Germanic tribes. Theirs stage of development was rather primitive, especially if compared with the high civilization of Rome. They are primitive cattle-breeders and know almost nothing about land cultivation. Their tribal languages contain only Indo-European and Germanic elements .

Due to Roman invasion Germanic tribes had to come into contact with Romans. Romans built roads, bridges, military camps. Trade is carried on, and the Germanic people gain knowledge of new and useful things. The first among them are new things to eat. It has been mentioned that Germanic cattle-breeding

was on a primitive scale. Its only products known to the Germanic tribes were meat and milk. It is from the Romans that they learn how to make butter and cheese and, as there are naturally no words for these foodstuffs in their tribal languages, they had to use the *Latin words* to name them (Lat. “butyrum”, “caseus”). It is also to the Romans that the Germanic tribes owe the knowledge of some new fruits and vegetables of which they had no idea before, and the Latin names of these fruits and vegetables entered their vocabularies: “cherry” (Lat. “cerasum”), “pear” (Lat. “pirum”), “plum” (Lat. “prunus”), “pea” (Lat. “pisum”), “beet” (Lat. “beta”), “pepper” (Lat. “piper”).

Here are some more examples of Latin borrowings of this period: “cup” (Lat. “cuppa”), “kitchen” (Lat. “coquina”), “mill” (Lat. “molina”), “port” (Lat. “portus”), “wine” (Lat. “vinum”).

The Germanic tribal languages gained a considerable number of new words and were thus enriched.

Latin words became the earliest group of borrowings in the future **English language** which was - much later - **built on the basis of the Germanic tribal languages**.

The fifth century A.D. Several of the Germanic tribes (the most numerous among them were the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes) migrated across the sea to the British Isles. There they were confronted by the Celts, the original inhabitants of the Isles. The Celts desperately defended their lands against the invaders, but nevertheless gradually yielded most of their territory. They retreated to the North and South-West (modern Scotland, Wales and Cornwall). Through numerous contacts with the defeated Celts, the conquerors borrowed a number of *Celtic words* (bald, down, glen, bard, cradle). Especially numerous among the Celtic borrowings were place names, names of rivers, hills, etc. The Germanic tribes occupied the land, but the names of many parts of their territory remained Celtic. For instance, the names of the rivers Avon, Exe, Esk, Usk, Ux originate from Celtic words meaning "river" and "water".

Ironically, even the name of the English capital originates from Celtic “Llyn+dun” in which “llyn” is another Celtic word for "river" and “dun” stands for "a fortified hill" - the meaning of the whole is "fortress on the hill over the river".

Some Latin words entered the Anglo-Saxon languages through Celtic, among them such widely-used words as “street” (Lat. *strata via*) and “wall” (Lat. *vallum*).

The seventh century A.D. This century was significant for the christianization of England. Latin was the official language of the Christian church, and consequently the spread of Christianity was accompanied by a new period of Latin borrowings. These borrowings no longer came from spoken Latin as they did eight centuries earlier, but from **church Latin**. Also, these new Latin borrowings were very different in meaning from the earlier ones. They mostly indicated persons, objects and ideas associated with church and religious rituals: e. g. priest (Lat. *presbyter*), bishop (Lat. *episcopus*), monk (Lat. *monachus*), nun (Lat. *nonna*), candle (Lat. *candela*).

It was quite natural that educational terms were also Latin borrowings, for the first schools in England were church schools, and the first teachers priests and monks. So, the very word “school” is a Latin borrowing (Lat. *schola*, of Greek origin) and so are such words as “scholar” (Lat. *Scholar(-is)*) and “magister” (Lat. *magister*).

From the end of the 8th century to the middle of the 11th century England underwent several Scandinavian invasions. Here are some examples of early **Scandinavian borrowings** : call (v.), take (v.), cast (v.), die (v.), law (n.), husband (n.), window (n.), ill (adj.), loose, (adj.), low (adj.), weak (adj.). Some of Scandinavian borrowings are easily recognizable by the initial (sk-) combination. E. g. sky, skill, skin, ski, skirt.

Certain English words changed their meanings under the influence of Scandinavian words of the same root. So, the old English “bread” which meant "piece" acquired its modern meaning by association with the Scandinavian

“braud”. The old English “dream” which meant "joy" assimilated the meaning of the Scandinavian “draumr”.

1066. With the famous Battle of Hastings, when the English were defeated by the Normans under William the Conqueror, began the eventful epoch of the Norman Conquest. The Norman culture of the 11th century was certainly superior to that of the Saxons. The result was that English vocabulary acquired a great number of French words. But instead of being smashed and broken by the powerful intrusion of the foreign element, the English language managed to preserve its essential structure and vastly enriched its expressive resources with the new borrowings. England became abilingual country, and the impact on the English vocabulary made over this two-hundred-years period is immense: French words from the Norman dialect penetrated every aspect of social life. Here is a very brief list of examples of *Norman French borrowings*.

Administrative words: state, government, parliament, council, power.

Legal terms: court, judge, justice, crime, prison.

Military terms: army, war, soldier, officer, battle, enemy.

Educational terms: pupil, lesson, library, science, pen, pencil.

Terms of everyday life: table, plate, dinner, supper, river, autumn, uncle, etc.

The Renaissance Period. In England, as in all European countries, this period was marked by significant developments in science, art and culture and, also, by a revival of interest in the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome and their languages. Hence, there occurred a considerable number of *Latin and Greek borrowings*. In contrast to the earliest Latin borrowings (1st century B.C.), the Renaissance ones were rarely concrete names. They were mostly abstract words (e. g. major, minor, moderate, intelligent, permanent, to elect, to create). There were numerous scientific and artistic terms (e.g. datum, status, phenomenon, philosophy, method, music). Quite a number of words were borrowed into English from Latin and had earlier come into Latin from Greek.

The Renaissance was a period of extensive cultural contacts between the major European states. Therefore, it was only natural that new words also

entered the English vocabulary from other European languages. The most significant were French borrowings. This time they came from the Parisian dialect of French and are known as *Parisian borrowings*. Examples: routine, police, machine, ballet, matinee, scene, technique, bourgeois, etc. *Italian* also contributed a considerable number of words to English, e. g. piano, violin, opera, alarm, colonel.

The historical survey above shows the ways in which English vocabulary developed and of the major events through which it acquired its vast modern resources. Summary is shown in the table 1.

The second column of the table contains more groups, but it also implies a great quantity of words. Modern scholars estimate the percentage of borrowed words in the English vocabulary at 65—70 per cent which is an exceptionally high figure. It means that the native element doesn't prevail. This anomaly is explained by the country's eventful history and by its many international contacts.

Considering the high percentage of borrowed words, one would have to classify English as a language of international origin or, at least, a Romance one (as French and Latin words obviously prevail). But here another factor comes into play: the native element in English comprises a large number of high-frequency words like the articles, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, auxiliaries and, also, words denoting everyday objects and ideas (e. g. house, child, water, go, come, eat, good, bad, etc.).

Furthermore, the grammatical structure is essentially Germanic and it remains unaffected by foreign influence.

The Etymological Structure of English Vocabulary

table 1

The native element	The borrowed element
1. Indo-European element	I. Celtic (5 th – 6 th c.A.D.).
2. Germanic element	II. Latin

1 st group: 1 st c.B.C.	
2 st group: 7 th c.A.C.	
3 st group: the Renaissance period	
3.English Proper element (no earlier than 5 th c.A.D.)	III. Scandinavian (8 th – 11 th c.A.D.)
IV. French	
1. Norman borrowings: 11 th –13 th c.A.D.	
2. Parisian borrowings (Renaissance)	
V. Greek (Renaissance)	
VI. Italian (Renaissance and later)	
VII. Spanish (Renaissance and later)	
VIII. German	
IX. Indian	
X. Russian and some other groups	

The first column of the table consists of three groups, only the third being dated: the words of this group appeared in the English vocabulary in the 5th century or later, that is, after the Germanic tribes migrated to the British Isles. The tribal languages of the Angles, the Saxons, the Jutes, by the time of their migration, contained only words of Indo-European and Germanic roots plus a certain number of the earliest Latin borrowings.

By **the Indo-European element** are meant words of roots common to all (or most) languages of the Indo-European group. The words of this group denote elementary concepts without which no human communication would be possible. The following groups can be identified.

1. Family relations: father, mother, brother, son, daughter.
2. Parts of the human body: foot, nose, lip, heart.
3. Animals: cow, swine, goose.
4. Plants: tree, birch, corn.
5. Time of day: day, night.
6. Heavenly bodies: sun, moon, star.

7. Numerous adjectives: red, new, glad, sad.
8. The numerals from one to a hundred.
9. Pronouns - personal (except “they” which is a Scandinavian borrowing) and demonstrative.
10. Numerous verbs: be, stand, sit, eat, know.

The *Germanic element* represents words of roots common to all or most Germanic languages. Some of the main groups of Germanic words are the same as in the Indo-European element.

1. Parts of the human body: head, hand, arm, finger, bone.
2. Animals: bear, fox, calf.
3. Plants: oak, fir, grass.
4. Natural phenomena: rain, frost.
5. Seasons of the year: winter, spring, summer.
6. Landscape features: sea, land.
7. Human dwellings and furniture: house, room, bench.
8. Sea-going vessels: boat, ship.
9. Adjectives: green, blue, grey, white, small, thick, high, old, good.
10. Verbs: see, hear, speak, tell, say, answer, make, give, drink.

The *English proper element* is opposed to the first two groups. For not only it can be approximately dated, but these words have another distinctive feature: they are specifically English have no cognates in other languages whereas for Indo-European and Germanic words such cognates can always be found, as, for instance, for the following words of the Indo-European group.

Star: Germ. - Stern, Lat. - Stella, Gr. - aster.

Stand: Germ. – stehen, Lat. - stare, R. – стоять.

Here are some examples of English proper words: bird, boy, girl, lord, lady, woman, daisy, always.

Structural elements of borrowings

There are certain *structural features* which enable us to identify some words as borrowings and even to determine the source language. We have already established that the initial (sk) usually indicates Scandinavian origin. We can also recognize words of Latin and French origin by certain suffixes, prefixes or endings. Here are some typical and frequent structural elements of Latin and French borrowings:

Latin affixes of nouns:

The suffix (-ion): legion, opinion, etc.; the suffix (-tion): relation, temptation, etc.

Latin affixes of verbs:

The suffix (-ate): appreciate, create, congratulate, etc.; the suffix (-ute): attribute, distribute, etc.; the remnant suffix (-ct): act, collect, conduct, etc.; the prefix (dis-): disable, disagree, etc.

Latin affixes of adjectives:

The suffix (-able): detestable, curable, etc.; the suffix (-ate): accurate, graduate, etc.; the suffix (-ant): constant, important, etc.; the suffix (-ent): absent, evident, etc.; the suffix (-or): major, senior, etc.; the suffix (-al): final, maternal, etc.; the suffix (-ar): solar, familiar, etc.

French affixes of nouns:

The suffix (-ance): endurance, hindrance, etc.; the suffix (-ence): consequence, patience, etc.; the suffix (-ment): appointment, development, etc.; the suffix (-age): courage, marriage, village, etc.; the suffix (-ess): actress, adventuress, etc.

French affixes of verbs:

The prefix (en-): enable, enact, enslave, etc.

French affixes of adjectives:

The suffix (-ous): curious, dangerous, etc.

It's important to note that later formations derived from native roots borrowed Latin and French affixes (e.g. eatable, lovable).

Why Are Words Borrowed?

Sometimes it is done to fill a gap in vocabulary . When the Saxons borrowed Latin words for "butter", "plum", "beet", they did it because their own vocabularies lacked words for these new objects. For the same reason the words "potato" and "tomato" were borrowed by English from Spanish when these vegetables were first brought to England by the Spaniards.

But there is also a great number of words which are borrowed for other reasons. There may be a word (or even several words) which expresses some particular concept, so that there is no gap in the vocabulary and there does not seem to be any need for borrowing. However a word is borrowed because it supplies a new shade of meaning or a different emotional colouring though it represents the same concept. This type of borrowing enlarges groups of synonyms and provides to enrich the expressive resources of the vocabulary. That is how the Latin "cordial" was added to the native "friendly", the French "desire" to "wish", the Latin "admire" and the French "adore" to "like" and "love".

The historical circumstances stimulate the borrowing process. Each time two nations come into close contact. The nature of the contact may be different. It may be wars, invasions or conquests when foreign words are imposed upon the conquered nation. There are also periods of peace when the process of borrowing is due to trade and international cultural relations.

Do Borrowed Words Change or

do They Remain the Same?

When words migrate from one language into another they adjust themselves to their new environment and get adapted to the norms of the recipient language. They undergo certain changes which gradually erase their foreign features, and, finally, they are assimilated. Sometimes the process of assimilation develops to the point when the foreign origin of a word is quite unrecognizable. It is difficult

to believe now that such words as “dinner”, “cat”, “take”, “cup” are not English by origin. Others, though well assimilated, still bear traces of their foreign background. “Distance” and “development”, for instance, are identified as borrowings by their French suffixes, “skin” and “sky” by the Scandinavian initial (-sk), “police” and “regime” by the French stress on the last syllable.

Borrowed words are adjusted in the three main areas of the new language system: the phonetic, the grammatical and the semantic.

The lasting nature of *phonetic adaptation* is best shown by comparing Norman French borrowings to later (Parisian) ones. The Norman borrowings have for a long time been fully adapted to the phonetic system of the English language: such words as “table”, “plate”, “courage”, “chivalry” bear no phonetic traces of their French origin. Some of the later (Parisian) borrowings, even the ones borrowed as early as the 15th century, still sound surprisingly French: “regime”, “valise”, “matinee”, “cafe”, “ballet”. In these cases phonetic adaptation is not completed.

Grammatical adaptation consists in a complete change of the former paradigm of the borrowed word. If it is a noun, it is certain to adopt, sooner or later, a new system of declension; if it is a verb, it will be conjugated according to the rules of the recipient language. Yet, this is also a lasting process. The Russian noun “пальто” was borrowed from French early in the 19th century and has not yet acquired the Russian system of declension. The same can be said about such English Renaissance borrowings as “datum” (pl. data), “phenomenon” (pl. phenomena), “criterion” (pl. criteria) whereas earlier Latin borrowings such as “cup”, “plum”, “street”, “wall” were fully adapted to the grammatical system of the language long ago.

By *semantic adaptation* is meant adjustment to the system of meanings of the vocabulary. Sometimes a word may be borrowed "blindly" for no obvious reason: they are not wanted because there is no gap in the vocabulary nor in the group of synonyms which it could fill. Quite a number of such "accidental" borrowings are very soon rejected by the vocabulary and forgotten. But some

“blindly” borrowed words managed to establish itself due to the process of semantic adaptation. The adjective “large”, for instance, was borrowed from French in the meaning of "wide". It was not actually wanted, because it fully coincided with the English adjective “wide” without adding any new shades or aspects to its meaning. This could have led to its rejection. Yet, “large” managed to establish itself very firmly in the English vocabulary by semantic adjustment. It entered another synonymic group with the general meaning of “big in size”. Still bearing some features of its former meaning it is successfully competing with “big” having approached it very closely, both in frequency and meaning.

International Words

It is often the case that a word is borrowed by several languages, not just by one. Such words usually convey concepts which are significant in the field of communication. Many of them are of Latin and Greek origin.

Most names of sciences are international (e. g. philosophy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, medicine, linguistics, lexicology). There are also numerous terms of art in this group: music, theatre, drama, tragedy, comedy, artist, primadonna, etc.; and the sports terms : football, volley-ball, baseball, hockey, cricket, rugby, tennis, golf, etc. It is quite natural that political terms frequently occur in the international group of borrowings: politics, policy, revolution, progress, democracy, communism, anti-militarism. 20th century scientific and technological advances brought a great number of new international words: atomic, antibiotic, radio, television, sputnik (a Russian borrowing). Fruits and foodstuffs imported from exotic countries often transport their names too and become international: coffee, cocoa, chocolate, banana, mango, avocado, grapefruit.

The similarity of such words as the English “son”, the German “Sohn” and the Russian “сын” should not lead one to the quite false conclusion that they are international words. They represent the Indo-European group of the native

element in each respective language and are cognates, i. e. words of the same etymological root, and not borrowings.

Etymological Doublets

The words originating from the same etymological source, but differing in phonemic shape and in meaning are called *etymological doublets*.

They may enter the vocabulary by different routes. Some of these pairs consist of a native word and a borrowed word: “shrew”, n. (E.) – “screw”, n. (Sc.). Others are represented by two borrowings from different languages: “canal” (Lat.) - “channel” (Fr.), “captain” (Lat.) — “chieftain” (Fr.). Still others were borrowed from the same language twice, but in different periods: “travel” (Norm. Fr.) - “travail” (Par. Fr.), “cavalry” (Norm.Fr.) - “chivalry” (Par. Fr.), “gaol” (Norm. Fr.) - “jail” (Par. Fr.).

A doublet may also consist of a shortened word and the one from which it was derived: “history” - “story”, “fantasy” - “fancy”, “defence” - “fence”, “shadow” - “shade”.

Etymological **triplets** (i. e. groups of three words of common root) occur rarer, but here are at least two examples: “hospital” (Lat.) — “hostel” (Norm. Fr.) — “hotel” (Par.Fr.), “to capture” (Lat.) — “to catch” (Norm. Fr.) — “to chase” (Par. Fr.).

Translation-Loans

By translation-loans we indicate borrowings of a special kind. They are not taken into the vocabulary of another language more or less in the same phonemic shape in which they have been functioning in their own language, but undergo the process of translation. It is quite obvious that it is only compound words (i. e. words of two or more stems). Each stem was translated separately: “masterpiece” (from Germ. “Meisterstück”), “wonder child” (from Germ. “Wunderkind”), “first dancer” (from Ital. “prima-ballerina”).

Are Etymological and Stylistic Characteristics
of Words Interrelated?

The answer must be affirmative. Among learned words and terminology the foreign element dominates the native.

It also seems that the whole opposition of "formal versus informal" is based on the deeper underlying opposition of "borrowed versus native", as the informal style, especially slang and dialect, abounds in native words even though it is possible to quote numerous exceptions.

In point of comparing the expressive and stylistic value of the French and the English words the French ones are usually more formal, more refined, and less emotional. "to begin" – "to commence", "to wish" — "to desire", "happiness" — "felicity".

English words are much warmer than their Latin synonyms, they don't sound cold and dry: "motherly" — "maternal", "fatherly" — "paternal", "childish" — "infantile", "daughterly" — "filial", etc.