

# 1 Overview

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## 1.1 Introduction

David Crystal estimates that about 400 million people have English as their first language, and that in total as many as 1500 million may be to a greater or lesser extent fluent speakers of English (see Chapter 9, Table 9.1). The two largest countries (in terms of population) where English is the inherited national language are Britain and the USA. But it is also the majority language of Australia and New Zealand, and a national language in both Canada and South Africa. Furthermore, in other countries it is a second language, in others an official language or the language of business.

If, more parochially, we restrict ourselves to Britain and the USA, the fact that it is the inherited national language of both does not allow us to conclude that English shows a straightforward evolution from its ultimate origins. Yet originally English was imported into Britain, as also happened later in North America. And in both cases the existing languages, whether Celtic, as in Britain, or Amerindian languages, as in North America, were quickly swamped by English. But in both Britain and the USA, English was much altered by waves of immigration. Chapter 8 will demonstrate how that occurred in the USA.

In Britain, of course, the Germanic-speaking Anglo-Saxons brought their language with them as immigrants. The eighth and ninth centuries saw Scandinavian settlements and then the Norman Conquest saw significant numbers of French-speaking settlers. Both these invasions had a major impact on the language, which we shall discuss later in this chapter. However, they should not obscure the constant influence of other languages on English, whether through colonisation or through later immigration. Some idea of the polyglot nature of the language (as opposed to its speakers) can be gleaned from the figures presented in Table 1.1, based upon etymologies in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. (Note that the already-existing language English did not get its basic vocabulary and structure from any of the languages in Table 1.1; the origins of English will be introduced shortly.)

The *OED* is probably the most complete historical dictionary of any language. The languages in Table 1.1 have been chosen (from over 350 in *OED*!) only in order to demonstrate the variety of linguistic sources for English. The figures in Table 1.1 remain imprecise, despite elaborate electronic searches of the entire *OED* (with its 20+ ways of marking a French loan and 50+ for Scandinavian): exact figures are beside the point and in fact unattainable.

Table 1.1 *Some sources of English words (OED<sup>2</sup>)*

Latin	24,940
French	9,470
Scandinavian	1,530
Spanish	1,280
Dutch, including Afrikaans	860
Arabic	615
Turkish	125
Hindi	120
Hungarian	26
Cherokee	1–3

Even when we are dealing with only one country, say Britain or the USA, there are a wide range of varieties of English available. These varieties are dependent on various factors. Each speaker is different from every other speaker, and often in non-trivial ways. Thus speaker A may vary from speaker B in geographical dialect. And the context of speech varies according to register, or the social context in which the speaker is operating at the time. Register includes, for example, occupational varieties, and it interacts with such features as the contrast between written and spoken language (medium) or that between formal and colloquial language.

It will be clear that the above points raise the question of what this volume purports to be a history *of*. There are, we can now see, many different Englishes. And these Englishes can interact in an intricate fashion. To take a single example, how might we order the relationships between written colloquial English and spoken formal English? Not, surely, on a single scale. And as English becomes more and more of a global language, the concept of dialect becomes more and more opaque. In writing this volume, therefore, we have had to make some fundamental decisions about what English is, and what history we might be attempting to construct.

In making these decisions we have had to bear two different aims in mind. One is to be able to give some plausible account of where English is situated today. Therefore many of the chapters pay particular attention to the present-day language, the chapter on English worldwide almost exclusively so. But this is a history, and therefore our other aim is to demonstrate how English has developed over the centuries. And not merely for its own sake, but because of our joint belief that it is only through understanding its history that we can hope adequately to understand the present.

At this point we first introduce some conventional labels for periods in the recorded history of English. From its introduction on the island of Britain to the end of the eleventh century, the language is nowadays known as Old English (OE). From c. 1100 to around the end of the fifteenth century is called the Middle English

(ME) period, and from c.1500 to the present day is called Modern English (ModE). ModE is distinct therefore from present-day English (PDE), which, if a period at all, extends at most to the childhoods of people now living, say from the early twentieth century to the present. Division into periods is to a large extent arbitrary, if convenient for reference and sanctioned by scholarly tradition. There is both linguistic and non-linguistic justification for identifying (roughly) those periods, though sometimes with slightly differing transition dates, and sometimes with the main periods of OE, ME and ModE divided into early and late sub-periods. Other periodisations have been proposed, however, and in any case the transition dates suggested above should not be taken too seriously. There is no point in further discussion until more evidence of the detailed history has been presented.

## 1.2 The roots of English

What is English? Who are the people who have spoken it? Before we begin our exploration of the internal history of English, it is questions such as these which must be answered. If we trace history back, then, wherever English is spoken today, whether it be in Bluff, New Zealand, or Nome, Alaska, in every case its ultimate origins lie in Anglo-Saxon England. If we consider the map of Anglo-Saxon England (Figure 1.1), based on the place-names in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* of the early eighth century, we get some impression of what the Anglo-Saxons might have thought of as their heartland. This map is, of course, incomplete in that it relies on only a single, albeit contemporary, source. Furthermore, Bede lived his whole life at Jarrow in County Durham, and his material is necessarily centred on Northumbria and ecclesiastical life. Nevertheless, it is a useful reminder that the original English settlements of Britain concentrated on the east and south coasts of the country.

Of course, this is not unexpected. The Anglo-Saxon speakers of English had started to come to Britain early in the fifth century from the lands across the North Sea – roughly speaking, the largely coastal areas between present-day Denmark and the Netherlands and the immediate hinterland. Bede himself states that the Anglo-Saxon invaders came from three tribes, the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes. He equates the Angles with Anglian, the Saxons with Saxon, and the Jutes with Kentish. Certainly, it is safe to conclude that the earliest settlements were in East Anglia and the southeast, with a steady spread along the Thames valley, into the midlands, and northwards through Yorkshire and into southern Scotland.

Looking further afield, both in geography and time, English was a dialect of the Germanic branch of Indo-European. What does this mean? Indo-European refers to a group of languages, some with present-day forms, such as English, Welsh, French, Russian, Greek and Hindi, others now 'dead', such as Latin, Cornish (though revived by enthusiasts), Tocharian and Sanskrit, which are all believed to have a common single source. We do not have texts of Germanic, which is usually held to have existed in a generally common core between about 500 BC and about



Figure 1.1 Anglo-Saxon England (from Hill, 1981)

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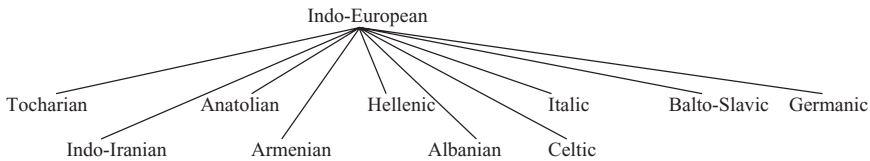


Figure 1.2 *The Indo-European languages*

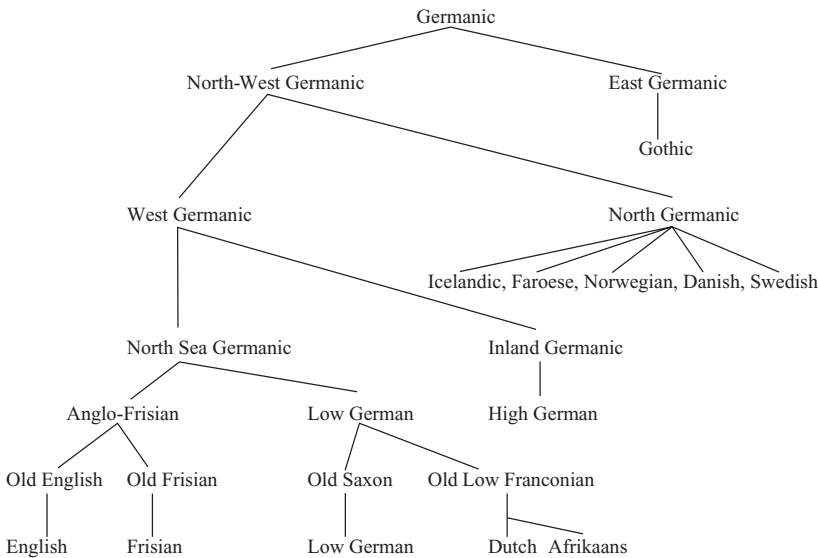


Figure 1.3 *The Germanic languages*

AD 200. Still less is there any textual evidence for the language we call Indo-European. The most usual view is that Indo-European originated in the southern steppes of Russia, although an alternative view holds that it spread from Anatolia in modern-day Turkey. The variety of opinions can be found in works such as Lehmann (1993), Gimbutas (1982), Renfrew (1987), and the excellent discussion in Mallory (1989). Many older works are equally important, and Meillet (1937) remains indispensable.

Whatever the actual shape of Indo-European (much work has been done to define this over the last two centuries), and wherever and whenever it may have been spoken, it will be obvious that any language which is the source of present-day languages as diverse as Hindi, Russian, Latin and English has everywhere undergone substantial change. The normal method of displaying the later developments of Indo-European is by a family tree such as that shown in Figure 1.2. Although family trees such as this are the staple diet of most books on historical linguistics, they should always be treated with caution. Indo-European is necessarily a vague, or at least fuzzy, entity, and the same is true of its branches.

In order to see that, consider a fairly standard family tree of Germanic, of which English is one part, such as that shown in Figure 1.3. Such a tree obscures a variety of problems, and one reason for this is that it forces a strict separation

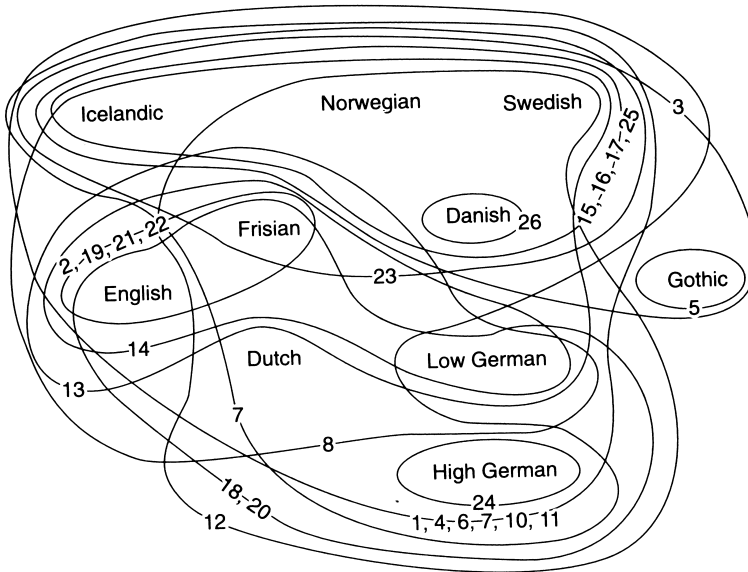


Figure 1.4 Wave representation of Germanic (after Trask, 1996)

between languages which certainly could only have emerged over a period of time and where various features may be shared by apparently discrete languages.

It is, therefore, worth comparing the family tree in Figure 1.3 with an alternative arrangement derived from the wave theory of language relationship, where languages are placed on an abstract map according to their degree of similarity. Figure 1.4 is one such diagram, based on significant shared linguistic features – the lines marking off the spread of features are called isoglosses. What both this wave diagram and the family tree demonstrate in their different ways is that the closest language to English in purely linguistic terms is Frisian, still spoken by about 400,000 Frisian–Dutch bilinguals in the Dutch province of Friesland and a few thousand speakers in Germany, most of them in Schleswig-Holstein.

How can we tell that the origins of English are as we have described? After all, the oldest English texts, apart from tiny fragments, date from about AD 700, and the only older Germanic texts are from Gothic, about 200–300 years earlier. And perhaps the earliest other Indo-European texts – the Anatolian languages, principally Hittite and Luwian – are from about 1400 BC. The method by which we attempt to deduce prehistoric stages of a language is called comparative reconstruction, and it is useful to consider one simple, but nevertheless important, example of this as shown in Table 1.2.

If you compare the forms language by language, then a number of features should become clear:

- where Sanskrit, Greek and Latin have /p/, English has /f/
- where Sanskrit, Greek and Latin have /t/, English has /θ/ (= OE *þ*)
- where Greek and Latin have /k/, and Sanskrit has /ś/, English has /h/

Table 1.2 *An example of comparative reconstruction*

Sanskrit	Greek	Latin	Old English	PD English
pitá	patêr	pater	fæder	father
tráyas	treîs	trēs	þrēo	three
śatám	he-katón	centum	hund	hundred
kás	tís	quis	hwā	who

and furthermore the similarity of all the forms is so great that this cannot be the result of accident.

If we assume that English /h/ was originally the voiceless fricative /x/, for which there is early spelling evidence, then we can note that, with one exception to the above, wherever Sanskrit, Greek and Latin have a voiceless stop, English has a voiceless fricative. The principles of comparative reconstruction then say that, all other things being equal, the earliest texts show the older state of affairs. Therefore, the four languages concerned must have shared a common origin in which the initial consonants were \*/p, t, k/, where \* indicates a reconstructed form. In order to explain the apparently aberrant Sanskrit form *śatám* we have to claim that the original form was *\*katam* and that /k/ later became /ś/. We have so far ignored the forms of *who* in the fourth row. Rather than explaining these here, it might be instructive to see if you can work out why the Indo-European form might have been *\*/kwis/*. The example which we have just worked through, and which is called Grimm's Law after its discoverer, the nineteenth-century linguist and folklorist Jacob Grimm, is much more complex than we have suggested. Nevertheless it may give some indication of the methods of comparative reconstruction.

Exercises like the one just sketched form part of an edifice of scholarly knowledge built up over many years. Their success gives plausibility to hypotheses about the historical relationships between attested languages. Comparative reconstruction also allows one to fill in stages of language history for which there is no surviving historical evidence. It works most obviously in the areas of phonology, morphology and lexis, but even the syntax of Germanic and of Indo-European have been reconstructed in some detail. There is a danger that by *assuming* a single common ancestor one inevitably *produces* a single reconstructed proto-language. Potential circularity of this kind can be mitigated in ways to be discussed in a moment. In fact, much of what we think we know about the history of English is so tightly held in place in the accumulated mesh of interlocking hypotheses that its correctness is virtually certain. What appeals to the writers of this book is that there is so much still to discover.

In this process of intellectual discovery, the linguistic data are primary, but we can anchor our mesh of assumptions by means of certain 'reality checks' external to the language. Some are methodological. The greater the explanatory power of a hypothesis and the fewer special cases which have to be pleaded, the more likely

it is to be correct. Second, hypothesised states of the language and the necessary changes between such states are only acceptable if they can be paralleled by states and changes which have actually been attested elsewhere (the Uniformitarian Hypothesis, that the types of possible language and language change have not changed over time). Some are non-linguistic: we require our internal history of the language to fit in with what can be discovered of its external history, which in turn is enmeshed with the cultural, political, economic and archaeological histories of its speakers. (Much of this chapter is concerned with those particular kinds of relation.) And some anchors involve the histories of other languages, which have their own complex mesh of assumptions and reconstructions: when a good sideways link is found between two such language histories, each may be strengthened. Relevant examples include the values of the letters used in the Latin alphabet when it was applied to the spelling of English, and the borrowing of words at various times from other languages into English and from English into other languages. Notice that these constraints on the construction of linguistic history are as necessary for historical periods as for prehistory. Even when we have actual texts to work on, all but the most basic description is still no more than inference or hypothesis. Like all scientific endeavour, the findings of historical linguistics are provisional.

### 1.3 Early history: immigration and invasion

We have already noted that English is a member of the Germanic branch of Indo-European. As such it was brought to Britain by Germanic speakers. (This section has for convenience been given a rather anglocentric subtitle; after all, the Anglo-Saxon and indeed Viking invasions are *emigrations* from the point of view of the people(s) left behind.) Of course, when these speakers came to Britain, the island was already occupied, and by two groups. Firstly, by speakers of a number of languages belonging to the Celtic branch of Indo-European: Welsh, Scots Gaelic, Cumbric, Cornish and Manx. At the beginning of the fifth century Celtic speakers occupied all parts of Britain. Secondly, and at least until 410, there were Latin speakers, since Britain as far north as southern Scotland was a part of the Roman Empire. The withdrawal of Rome from Britain in 410 may well have been the catalyst for the Germanic settlement. In linguistic terms, obvious Celtic influence on English was minimal, except for place- and river-names (see Section 6.5.2), *pace* the important series of articles incorporated in Preusler (1956). Latin influence was much more important, particularly for vocabulary (see Section 4.2.3). However, recent work has revived the suggestion that Celtic may have had considerable effect on low-status, spoken varieties of Old English, effects which only became evident in the morphology and syntax of written English after the Old English period; see particularly Poussa (1990), Vennemann (2001) and the collections edited by Tristram (1997, 2000, 2003). Advocates of this still controversial approach variously provide some striking evidence of coincidence of





Figure 1.5 *The homeland of the Angles*

forms between Celtic languages and English, a historical framework for contact, parallels from modern creole studies, and – sometimes – the suggestion that Celtic influence has been systematically downplayed because of a lingering Victorian concept of condescending English nationalism.

As we have already mentioned, the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain began along the east and south coasts. The first settlements appear to have been in East Anglia. Exactly who these settlers were is hard to tell. Even the name ‘Anglo-Saxon’ is not of great help. The terms are not strictly comparable. The Angles probably formed a group of coastal dwellers in the area between, approximately, modern Amsterdam and southern Denmark (see Figure 1.5).

The Saxons, on the other hand, were a group of confederate tribes which may have included the Angles. Bede also tells us of the Jutes, about whom we know little more than that. But it seems significant that Kent and the Isle of Wight, where the Jutes seem to have been based, had distinctive features of their own, both linguistic and non-linguistic, throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. Deira, in Yorkshire, and Bernicia, in Northumberland, show linguistic and other signs of having been settled by somewhat different, more northerly, groups than elsewhere.

During the fifth century it is likely that the settlements were on the coast and along valleys, but within about a century settlement was extensive throughout the

country, from Northumbria down to Dorset, excluding only the hilliest areas of the Pennines. It is remarkable how quickly the settlement of much of the country was achieved. If we are to believe Bede's account of Hengest and Horsa, this would suggest that the first Germanic invaders came as warriors to help local British (i.e. Celtic) rulers as they fought amongst themselves. In other words, the departure of the Romans meant that the organisational structures which they had erected for the governance of the country had begun to decay. Thus a vacuum of authority and power was created by their departure, and the Germanic tribes, aware of the attractions of the country, perhaps because their fathers or forefathers had been mercenaries in the Roman army, were eager and willing to step into the breach.

But that is not quite enough to explain the rapidity of the Germanic settlement, which was far more a conquest of Britain, linguistically speaking, than the Norman Conquest 500 years later would be. What its speed suggests is that there must have been considerable population pressure in northwestern Europe at the time, perhaps partly because in the fifth century the average temperature was lower than it had been earlier and would again be later. Whatever the case may have been, this conquest saw an overwhelmingly rapid replacement or absorption of the existing Celtic linguistic community by the newly arrived Germanic speakers. There is now some genetic evidence for mass immigration to central England (Weale et al., 2002), consistent with displacement of the *male* Celtic population by Anglo-Saxons but saying nothing about females. Before long Celtic speakers had been confined to the lands west of Offa's Dyke, to Cornwall, the northwest, and north of the Borders of Scotland. The gradual elimination of Celtic has continued remorselessly, albeit slowly, ever since. It may only have been with the coming of Christianity and the establishment of churches and abbeys that Anglo-Saxon England started to achieve the beginning of the types of political and social structure which we associate with later centuries.

After this first phase we witness the consolidation of Anglo-Saxon authority over their newly won territory in the seventh century with the emergence of what we now call the Heptarchy, or the rule of the seven kingdoms. These were the kingdoms of Wessex, Essex, Sussex, Kent, East Anglia, Mercia and Northumbria. It would be misleading, however, to think of these 'kingdoms' in modern terms: they were more like tribal groups, their boundaries vague and subject to change, not susceptible to the precise delineation of the kind that we are accustomed to today. Even their number, although hallowed by antiquity, may be due as much to numerology as to historical fact.

We shall return to the issues surrounding the Heptarchy, but not the Heptarchy itself, when considering political and cultural history. At the moment we need only observe that by the later seventh century the major centres of power appear to have been amongst the northern kingdoms, and especially Northumbria. In the following century Mercia gradually became the key centre of power. But this was to change. For at the very end of the eighth century, in 793, as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reports*, 'the harrying of the heathen miserably destroyed God's church

in Lindisfarne by rapine and slaughter' (Garmonsway, 1954: 56). For now Britain was to be invaded once more. This time, however, the invasions were to come from fellow-speakers of Germanic, namely Scandinavian Vikings from Denmark and Norway.

For the next half-century or more, these invasions constituted no more than sporadic raids, particularly along the whole of the eastern and southern coasts. But from 835 onwards, when the Vikings attacked Sheppey on the Thames estuary, raids became more frequent until, in 865, a Viking army over-wintered in East Anglia. By 870 these Danes had overrun all the eastern parts of Mercia and Northumbria as well as East Anglia, whilst Norwegians had occupied northwestern parts as well as the Isle of Man, having first established a base in Dublin. The languages spoken by these invaders could not have been grossly different from the language of the Anglo-Saxons: at most they would have differed to much the same degree as spoken Glaswegian and Bronx English differ from each other today. Nevertheless, we can be certain that if it had not been for the resistance of Wessex, led by Alfred, the English spoken today would be much more like a language such as Danish.

Alfred came to the throne of Wessex in 871, at the height of the Danish invasions. Through his strategy and tactics in both war and diplomacy he was able, first, to regroup the Wessex forces and, then, to establish a truce with the Danes by the Treaty of Wedmore in 878. From our point of view, the most important feature of that treaty was that it recognised Danish settlement roughly speaking northeast of a line from London to Chester. This area was known as the Danelaw. In the Danelaw there must have been many Danish speakers living alongside English speakers, apparently with relatively little mutual hostility and their languages to some degree mutually intelligible.

As we shall see later, the success of Wessex in resisting the Danes had important repercussions for the political structure of the country, but the point to note at present is that this ensured the long-term dominance of English as the language of a more obviously national kingdom than had previously existed. Over time, the Viking invaders were assimilated into the native population. It is not surprising that, as this assimilation took place, Scandinavian linguistic features entered English quite extensively. Remarkably, however, there is little evidence for such features before the eleventh century. Indeed, of the most obvious Scandinavian features in the present-day language, namely the third-person pronoun *they*, which replaced Old English *hi*, and *are*, which replaced Old English *synt*, the latter is first found in northern dialects towards the very end of the tenth century and the former is a twelfth-century phenomenon. The earliest Scandinavian words are those such as *lagu* 'law' and *wicing* 'Viking, pirate', which have clear relations with the time of the Viking settlements. Other, everyday words which entered English from the settlements, such as *egg*, *guess*, *leg*, *sky*, *window*, only became apparent in later centuries.

And because English, Danish and Norse were so similar at the time of the settlements, there are quite a number of pairs of words, historically identical in

origin, which were typical of different areas. One such pair is *church* ~ *kirk*, where the former is English, the latter Scandinavian, for Scandinavian retains a velar stop where English shows palatalisation. One particularly interesting example of this is the place-element *-chester* (originally from Lat. *caster* or *castra*), for the variation between that form and *-caster* (phonologically modified by Scandinavian settlers), as in *Manchester* ~ *Lancaster*, helps us to assess the degree of Scandinavianisation in different parts of the country. We will return to this question below. An even more accurate picture of Scandinavian influence in Britain can be obtained by inspecting the distribution of Scandinavian place-names in Britain, as shown on the map, Figure 1.6.

A noteworthy feature of the eleventh century is that the beginning of the century saw an Anglo-Saxon king, Ethelred, on the throne, but by 1016 the Dane Cnut (Canute) was king; twenty-five years or so later, there was once more an Anglo-Saxon king, but from 1066 the king of England was a Norman. The first point to make here is that when Cnut came to the throne it was after prolonged warfare between the Anglo-Saxon king and the Danes, but during that period there were important English leaders on both sides (and neither), and that Cnut's accession to the throne after the death of Ethelred was not particularly hostile by the temper of the times (indeed, Cnut married Ethelred's widow, Emma, even if it was primarily a marriage of convenience and even if the fact that Cnut was not monogamous seems, not unnaturally, to have been a source of tension between them). But the linguistic distinctions between English and Danes seem not to have been the cause of serious hostility. On the Scandinavian presence in England, see further Chapter 6, especially Section 6.5.6.

When Edward the Confessor came to the throne in 1042, he was more a harbinger of Norman French influence than a restorer of the English tongue. He had spent a long time in exile, during which he cultivated close relations with the dukes of Normandy. He even appointed a Frenchman as bishop of London in 1050; furthermore, when he died in January 1066 he had managed to muddy the succession sufficiently to ensure that Harold and William of Normandy could both reasonably claim the throne, and neither was reluctant to do so. Famously it was William who triumphed.

The most important immediate effects of the Norman Conquest were political, for example in the appointment of Norman bishops and the redistribution of land to the Normans, as witnessed in the *Domesday Book*. Cultural, including linguistic, effects were much more long-term. That is to say, the eventual influence of French on English can be ascribed to the cultural patterns imposed on England as a consequence of the Conquest. (The situation was more complex in Scotland, still predominantly Gaelic-speaking, where some Normans and Saxons settled.) We noted earlier that Scandinavian structures took a long time to be embedded into the structure of English; the same is certainly true of French. One reason for this was undoubtedly the fact that French, belonging to an entirely different form of Indo-European, had developed independently from Germanic for a period stretching over many centuries. Consequently the structures of French were, and

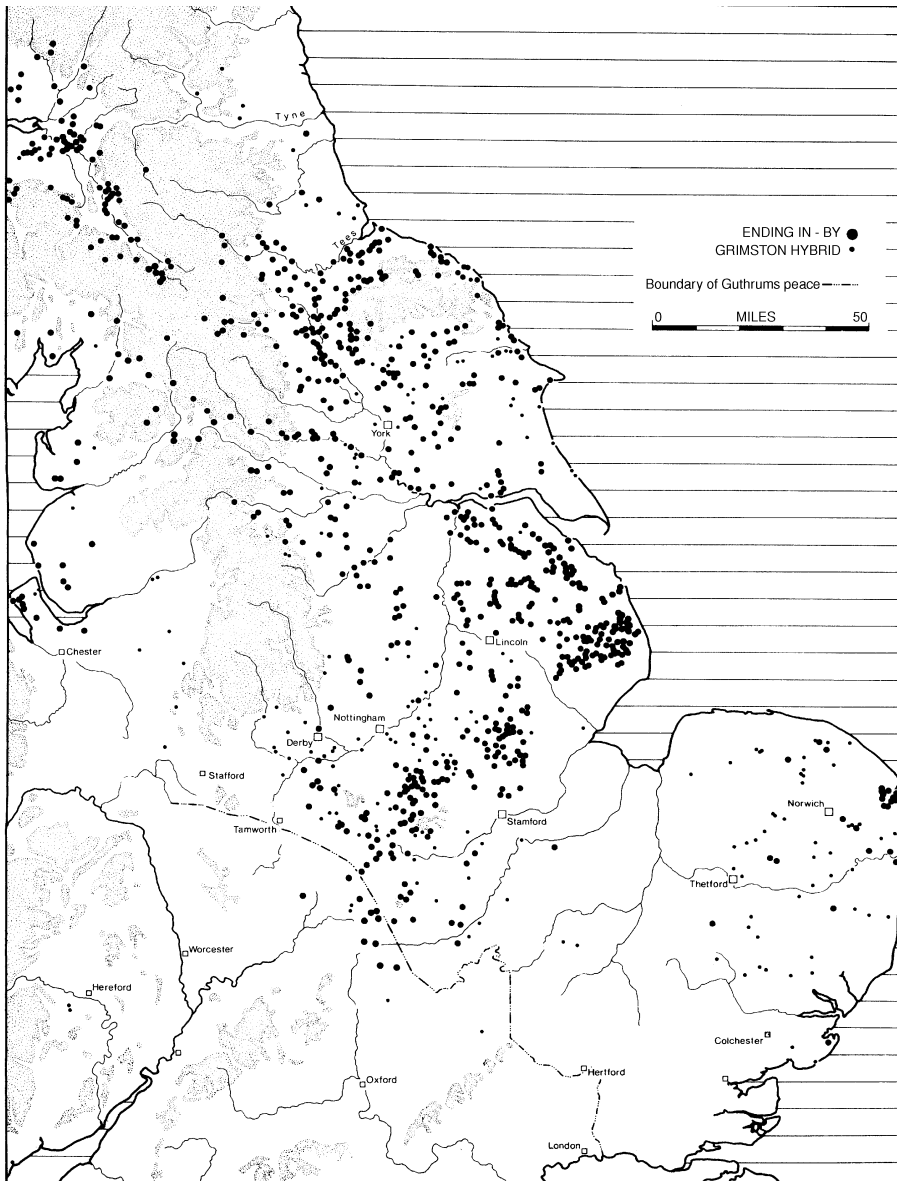


Figure 1.6 *Scandinavian place-names (Hill, 1981)*

remain, quite different from those of English. Thus there was no possibility of simple admixture, as there had been with Scandinavian. This, of course, meant that bilingualism, as the consequence of linguistic similarity, was far less likely.

To add to this, the pattern of social structures was very different from that obtaining in the Danelaw and eventually still larger parts of the country. Unlike the Scandinavians, the Norman French came as a superordinate power. It is true that the Normans, themselves in origin Franco-Viking, did not bring with them

some superordinate culture, but they brought power, authority and an aristocratic élite. We know that the new rulers had French as their mother tongue for many generations, but amongst the landowning classes we know that there were inter-marriages and that to that extent there was bilingualism. But it is far more difficult to assess the degree of that bilingualism. We can make some reasonable suggestions based on social class and on the basis that the Normans were very much a minority group in the country. Under these assumptions, we can surmise that the Normans were likely to acquire a degree of bilingualism simply in order to communicate with the far from silent majority. On the other hand, English speakers had to acquire French if they wished to prosper in aristocratic circles. The point is made more eloquently in the *Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester* in about 1325:

Pus com, lo, Englelond in-to Normandies hond:  
 And þe Normans ne couþe speke þo bote hor owe speche,  
 And speke French as hii dude atom, and hor children dude also teche,  
 So þat heiemmen of þis lond, þat of hor blod come,  
 Holdeþ alle þulke speche þat hii of hom nome;  
 Vor bote a man conne Frenss me telþ of him lute.  
 Ac lowe men holdeþ to Engliss, and to hor owe speche zute.  
 Ich wene þer ne beþ in al þe world contreys none  
 Pat ne holdeþ to hor owe speche, bote Englelond one.  
 Ac wel me wot uor to conne boþe wel it is,  
 Vor þe more þat a mon can, þe more wurþe he is.

Lo, in this way England came into the hands of Normandy: and the Normans could only speak their own language and spoke French, as they did at home, and also had their children taught it, so that the noblemen of this land, that came from their blood, all keep to the same language as they received from them; for unless a man knows French he is held in little regard. But men of low estate keep with English, and to their own language still. I think that there are no countries in the world where they do not keep with their own language, except England alone. But people know that it is good to know both, because the more a man knows, the more he is honoured.

There are a significant number of differences in the ways in which the Scandinavian and the French invasions affected the English language. Firstly, there is the matter of date. We have already noticed that Scandinavian influences only become apparent in the eleventh century. French influence too takes some time to percolate through the system. The time-lag is about one or two centuries. If we look at the *Peterborough Chronicle*, the last part of which (and equally the last remnant of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) was written in 1155, a few French loanwords appear, for example *iustise* replaces the Old English *rihtwisnesse*; a particularly interesting example is the replacement of *gersume* by *tresor* 'treasure', since the former is itself a loanword from Norse. Generally the number of French loans only becomes great in the following century. Furthermore, there is a dialectal

problem with French influence. The Normans who invaded spoke their regional dialect, which itself had been altered by Viking invasions. This dialect, therefore, was very different from the central French dialect of the areas around Paris and Orleans. Until the end of the twelfth century and the reign of Henry II, the French of the court was Anglo-Norman, but from then on the court became associated with Paris and Orleans, and the language changed accordingly. Chaucer makes the distinction clear in his description of the Prioress in his *General Prologue*:

And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly,  
After the scole of Stratford atte Bow,  
For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.

One example of the differences between Norman French and Central French is the word *chancellor*. When it first came into English it had the Norman form *cancellor*, with an initial velar stop. The Central French form, which had palatal /ʃ/ (cf. *kirk* vs *church* discussed earlier, also the result of Scandinavian influence), first appears only at the end of the thirteenth century.

A second feature which contrasts Scandinavian and French influence is linguistic variation in Britain. This shows itself in two different ways. We have already noted that Scandinavian influence was originally predominant in the Danelaw. In a moment or two we shall see that eventually many Scandinavian elements entered southern dialects as well, but this is a two-stage process. There is the original contact between the two languages which brought Scandinavian features into the English of the Danelaw. Then, later, there is spread within English by means of interdialectal contact. Contact between French and English, on the other hand, shows a much lesser geographical variation. The key here is register. That is to say, the variables which affect English in respect of French are far more to do with a contrast between types of social language than geography. Thus, if a text is concerned with, say, religion or science, or it is a formal piece, then it is probable that it will contain a higher proportion of French loanwords than a text which is purely secular or colloquial, whichever part of the country the text comes from. In this respect we should also note that Scandinavian loans are more likely to be colloquial (or everyday).

This feature is one which persists even in the present-day language, where, as in Middle English, we often find pairs of words with related meanings, one of which is English in origin, the other French. A typical example of such a doublet is *house* ~ *mansion* (cf. present-day French *maison*). The difference between the two words is essentially one of social prestige. This discussion naturally leads into a discussion of another language which influences English and has done so since the sixth century, namely Latin. In the Old English period Latin had contributed significantly to the lexical stock of English, but the Middle English period saw an even greater influx of Latin words. In part this was due to the fact that French, a Romance language, derived most of its structure and vocabulary from Latin. Consequently, it is often quite difficult, indeed sometimes impossible, to determine whether a word has been taken from French or from its antecedent

language. Sometimes it is possible to find triplets, that is to say, three words, one each from Latin, French and (home-grown) English, all with the same basic meaning. So we find *regal*, *royal* and *kingly* and, as with doublets, the social prestige typically varies between high-prestige Latin and low-prestige English.

None of the above is intended to deny the growing presence of French loanwords in everyday language. However, we have to be careful about some aspects of that vocabulary. For example, the introduction of French loans for food, such as *beef*, *pork* and *mutton*, is sometimes held to demonstrate a considerable degree of bilingualism. This view owes a great deal to Scott's *Ivanhoe*, which claims that animals on the hoof were called by their English names, but by French names when cooked. The initial reaction is to believe that; it is only when we recall terms such as English *lamb* (alongside *mutton*) or Anglo-Norman *cattle* alongside English *cow* that its plausibility diminishes. It is more likely, although less romantically appealing, to suggest that French loans were most probable in administration and learning, and that by and large 'ordinary' words were only borrowed in the few areas where there was constant interaction between English and French speakers. This neither demonstrates extensive bilingualism nor even that there was extensive borrowing beyond a few specific areas.

It is too easy to slip into the view that either the Danish Conquest or the Norman Conquest was the more important linguistically. The more likely position is that, throughout, the language remained fundamentally *English*. What we find is that the Danish Conquest had important consequences in some areas of the language. In particular, and as we have mentioned briefly already, some key elements in the present-day language come from Danish, above all many parts of the third-person pronoun system and part of the present tense of the verb *be*. The verbal inflexion *-s* is also probably due to Scandinavian influence. It has been argued that the simplification and loss of other inflections, particularly nominal and adjectival ones, might have been hastened by the intermingling of languages with similar vocabulary but noticeably different endings – even that there was extensive pidginisation in the Danelaw. It is in the core inflectional morphology of the language, plus such function words as *till* and *though*, that the most striking influences are seen.

What exactly was the linguistic contact situation in the Danelaw? Poussa (1982) argues that the language which developed there – and which was later to form the basis of standard English – was actually an Anglo-Scandinavian creole, though most others are sceptical of such a radical degree of intermixing. There is now an extensive literature on the question, with useful summaries by Danchev (1997), Görlach (1986), Hansen (1984), McWhorter (2002), Thomason & Kaufman (1988: 263–342) and Wallmannsberger (1988). Syntactic work by Kroch & Taylor (1997, and with Ringe, 2000) exploits the related idea that a Scandinavianised dialect of Middle English could have developed different rules of cliticisation and word order from dialects in the south, and that contact between such a northern dialect and more southerly dialects might have triggered the changes which led to modern English word order; see Sections 3.5.2, 3.5.3.



If an early Anglo-Celtic creole is at least a tenable hypothesis, and an Anglo-Danish creole even a plausible one, the case for an Anglo-French creole is much less so, though it too has been advocated; for details see the surveys just mentioned. Although we shall not examine the possibility any further, we should still look at French influence outside the borrowing of vocabulary. It is best to start by saying that French influence is largely absent from inflectional morphology. The only possibilities concern the eventual domination of the plural inflection *-s* at the expense of *-en* (hence *shoes* rather than *shoon*) and the rise of the personal pronoun *one*. Although there are parallels in French, it is virtually certain that the English developments are entirely independent.

The strongest influence of French can be best seen in two other areas, apparently unrelated but in fact closely connected to each other. These are: (i) derivational morphology; (ii) stress. Like all the other Germanic languages, Old English had a rich range of derivational prefixes and suffixes, and new words were routinely created by affixation and by compounding. When a gap in vocabulary was felt, native word formation was the default and foreign borrowing relatively the exception. One effect of the influx of French words into Middle English was that subsequently a recourse to foreign sources became quite normal – not that native word formation died out. (There is an obvious contrast with German, where until recently the use of native processes was overwhelmingly dominant.) Over time the inventory of affixes underwent a big change, with the loss of some items productive in OE and the adoption of many affixes, for example *-ment* for abstract nouns and *-able* for adjectives, deduced from their presence in loanwords. Furthermore the stress pattern of English words lost its simple, fixed pattern – primary stress carried by the first syllable apart from specific kinds of prefix – with the adoption of many words with the level stress of French. There was a period of uncertainty in the stressing of many borrowed words, in some cases lasting to the present day (*adult*, *controversy*), before most settled either into the traditional, Germanic pattern or the novel, Romance distribution. (A detailed discussion in terms of stress rules will be found in Section 2.6.2.4.) And these two areas of influence are linked by the fact that modern English derivational morphology seems to operate in two strata, roughly Germanic and Romance, which have separate distributions, different effects on the stressing of the resultant word, and which, when combined, typically put the Germanic affix closer to the stem.

## 1.4 Later history: internal migration, emigration, immigration again

The [previous section](#) dealt with three major invasions of the British Isles. For nearly a millennium now, England has had no hostile foreign armies marching over it, a remarkable record by European standards (even Switzerland's is shorter). The potential importance of this fact can be seen in a thought-experiment. Imagine a country of utter stability, where every local speech