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## THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The English language is a native tongue to the members of this society. It was native to most of our parents and grandparents. To ~~many of~~ us it is *probably* the only language which we can speak and read with comfort. We know that we live in an English speaking nation and that Canada, and certainly Great Britain, are dominated by this language; but, we forget that we live in an English speaking world.

In 1977 when we launched the American spacecraft, Voyager One, on its mission to Jupiter and beyond, there was a message recorded in fifty five languages to be broadcast to the people of outer space. To follow this was a recorded statement from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, an Austrian, Kurt Waldheim, speaking on behalf of 147 members states, in English!

The rise of English is a wonderful success story! When Julius Caesar and his Roman legions landed in Britain nearly 2,000 years ago, English did not exist. Five hundred years later as English, it was spoken in a form that would be as Greek or Sanskrit to us, by fewer persons than today speak Cherokee, - and with about the same influence. After a thousand more years had passed, or the end of the sixteenth century, William Shakespeare was in his prime and English was the native tongue of six or seven million Englishmen. Today, English is used by 750 million to as many as a billion people. To near half of these, it is a native tongue. As we are ending the twentieth century, it is more widely scattered, more widely written and spoken than any other language ever has been. It has become THE language of the planet, the first truly "global language".

Three quarters of the world's mail and its telexes and cables are in English; as is 80% of the information stored in computers. Nearly half

of all business deals in Europe are conducted in English. It is the official language of the Olympics, and the Miss Universe competition, as it is the voice of the air, the sea, and of Christianity; five of the world's largest broadcasting companies send their programs in English to audiences of over one hundred million.

English has no rival in its scope and magnitude. The Oxford English Dictionary lists 500,000 words, with another million scientific and technical yet not catalogued. Accepted estimates put the German vocabulary at 185,000, and French at under 100,000 - including such Franglais as le snacque-barre, and le hit-parade!

How did this remarkable language get its start, and how has it grown to its present condition? Each of you most assuredly has in your own home a dictionary which in its introduction and appendix will answer these questions.

In every case, it is stated that English comes from Indo-European lands and people. The pre-European origins or "Indo" included Baltic, Slavic, Greek, Hittite, Iranian, Sanskrit.

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Research in language has shown that when any people who spoke a single language were isolated by natural or political boundaries so that they lost contact with neighbors, they would begin to develop changes in their language. Thus a dialect would take form. After time if people using this dialect could not communicate freely with other groups of the original language, this dialect would be considered a new language. There are now as many as 2,700 recognized languages in the world, plus many sub-dialects.

It was as recently as 1786 that an amateur linguist, Sir William Jones, a British judge stationed in India, stumbled onto the roots of English. Jones was familiar with Greek and Latin and their influence on English. Then, while studying Sanskrit, he recognized so many common root forms in the three languages that he felt they must have a common origin. His careful

study and records led many philologists to pursue this theory and confirm the Indo-European origin of our language.

These Indo- or Indic people - wandered about until they came into the area north of the Black Sea; and the Germanic, West Germanic, Old English, Middle English, and English were developed.

The very early pre-historic form of animal life had many man-like skills - but until this animal became skilled in speech and communication, it was still an animal. With speech came the change from animal to man. Thus, we should say that "speech made the man", not "man the speech". Our predecessors must have been talking many, many thousand of years before they could write.

The spoken word always prevailed in language - not the written word. Written words must always be converted to the prevailing accepted sound.

Our old English came from West Germanic, being introduced by the Anglo-Saxons in fifth and sixth centuries, and prevailing until 1150; then Middle English until 1500; and, after that, the beginning of modern English.

Printing began in 1476, and since it was done almost exclusively in London, it was London English that became the standard. London English came from the South East of England. William Caxton was the printer, and Geoffrey Chaucer the writer whose work he printed.

While Chaucer always wrote in the current Middle English, the language of government was still French. In 1417, Henry V became the first English King since Harold to use English in his official documents, including his will. When he crossed the channel to fight the French, his first letter was in English - not the language of his enemies.

It is said that his predecessor, Edward III could only swear in English. Now it became the King's official language. It should be explained here

that this language had to survive the Norman invasion and conquest of England by the French Normans under William. King Harold was defeated and lost his life at Hastings in 1066. William established his own order, took over estates and lands, Norman bishops and abbots took over cathedrals and monasteries. French and Latin became the languages of Church, state and of all those in high places. Still, English prevailed as the spoken language of the mass of non-Norman peoples. Why was it not absorbed into the Norman French? For one thing, it was too well established, and after fusion with Scandinavian too vigorous and hardy to be lost. Then, there was much intermarrying between Norman and the conquered English. Thirdly, in 1204 the Anglo Normans lost control of their French territory across the Channel. The Norman nobility who had held estates in both lands now had to declare a single allegiance. Many chose England and reverted to its language. In order to communicate with their servants, farm hands, and trade people, they had no choice but to use the English language - cockney as it may have been.

The Norman-French were of Scandinavian-Norwegian stock, bold, daring, ready to invade and conquer.

The original language of the British Isles was Celtic, still dominant in Gaelic and Scots tongues, but not in the English of London. This Celtic influence was modified and replaced by Latin, Anglo-Saxon, Norman Franch, Germanic languages, and finally by American English; and all the languages and dialects of the world.

The years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I saw the first great blooming of the English language. About 150 years after her death, Samuel Johnson wrote of this achievement:

"From the authors which rose in the time of Elizabeth, a speech might be formed adequate to all purposes of use and elegance.



"If the language of theology were extracted from Hooker and the translation of the Bible; the terms of natural knowledge from Bacon; the phrases of policy, war, and navigation from Raleigh, the dialect of poetry and fiction from Spencer and Sidney; and the diction of common life from Shakespeare, few ideas would be lost to mankind, for want of English in which they might be expressed".

All of us accept the immeasurable influence of the authorized or King James version of the Holy Bible. For several centuries, it was often the only book to be found in many homes in England and in the USA. This widespread use of the Bible in its beautiful English fixed many people in an unwavering preference for the English language. The writing of Shakespeare added to acceptance of this language as the finest known. These works with Chaucer's Canterbury Tales are the primary foundations of English literature. It is known that the Oxford English Dictionary uses more quotations from Shakespeare than any other source to illustrate word usage. This is true because of Shakespeare's skillful use of words and the fact that his writing has been studied so carefully and every word catalogued.

Very recently, I was reading about a man who became a serious and popular writer of prose. He lamented the circumstances that led his father to discourage his youthful experiments with writing poetry. In poetry each word has to meet the requirements of rhyme and meter as well as meaning. Because of this a writer of poetry will develop his vocabulary and improve his knowledge and use of words.

There recently appeared in the New York Times some comments about a speech by Dr. B. F. Skinner at a meeting in New York of the American Psychological Association. The 83 year old Skinner argued that words used to describe what the mind does are metaphors that would appear to involve

physical not mental phenomena. In this connection he said:

"Extraordinary things have certainly been said about the mind.

The finest achievements of the species have been attributed to it ...

But, what it is and what it does are still far from clear...

The dictionaries are of no help. To understand what "mind" means, we must first look up 'perception', feeling, idea, intention' ... and we shall find each of them defined in terms of the other.

The words we use to refer to states of mind and cognitive processes began as references either to behavior or the setting in which behavior occurred. And, only very slowly have they become the vocabulary of something called the mind."

Since things often fall in the directions in which they are leaning, we say we are inclined to do something, or we have an inclination to do it. If we are strongly inclined, we may even say that we are bent on doing it. Since things also often move in the direction they are pulled, we say that we tend to do something (from the Latin TENDERE), to stretch or extend). There is nothing inside the organism but the organism itself. It is the whole organism that behaves"

More recently the Courier Journal reported that retired Harvard Professor J.S. Bruner had won an international foundation award of \$170,000. When informed of this, Bruner is reported to have said, "Oh, my goodness! I won? Are you sure? This is marvelous, \$170,000? Oh, my goodness". He further stated in reference to his work, on the relation of thought to language that thought gives shape to language, and language serves as a vehicle for thought. As a simple example he said. "The most striking thing is the way a child, learning a language, learns to talk to himself about what he has said. He says something, then reflects on how he had said it, and thereby shapes his thought".

Now, to return to the forming of the English language, it came about through three invasions, Germanic, Angle-Saxons (Latin & Greek) and Danes; then the transforming by the French speaking Normans. Of the Welsh or Celtic influence, it is known that they reverse a normal word sequence and would say "Pity it was that he died so early". They use d throw-away words, such as like, indeed, look you, from habit but very likely as a stop gap for them, as for us today - while we search for words to finish our sentence or thought. A computer analysis of the language has shown the one hundred most common words in English are all of Anglo-Saxon origin.

When in ~~the~~ 1940 Winston Churchill wished to appeal to the hearts and minds of his own people, it is probably no accident that he spoke in the barren plainness for which old English is noted: "We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets; we shall never surrender". In this familiar passage only surrender is foreign.- Norman-French.

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After the Viking invasions English could have been swallowed and lost or replaced by Danish if King Alfred had not finally been able to expel these invaders from his Wessex kingdom. Then, he decreed the study and learning of English, and rebuilding of monasteries and schools, using English to create a sense of national identity.

Elizabethan English was richly developed by Shakespeare, words could be used as any part of speech.

You could happy your friend, malice or foot your enemy, or fall an axe on his neck. Shakespeare used such non-standard forms of expressions as these:

"He could "uncle me no <sup>uncle</sup> ~~unde~~".

"How she might tongue me"

"Lord Angelo dukes it well in his absence."

I believe it is true that the Bible and Shakespeare are quoted more often than any other writings. From Hamlet alone we have the following - and more:

"Frailty, thy name is woman."

"The time is out of joint".

"Brevity is the soul of wit."

"More matter with less art."

"The primrose path of dalliance."

Shakespeare is replete with instances of the variety of English usage. One I have seen quoted is from Henry V in the scene where three captains discuss the strategy of the Battle of Agincourt.

The Irish: ... tish ill done! The work ish give over the trompet  
sound the Retreat....

The Welsh: Captain Macmorris, I beseech you now will you vouchsafe  
me, Iook you, a few disputations with you, as partly  
touching or concerning the disciplines of war...

Scots: It shall be very gud, gud faith, gud captens bath; and I  
shall quit you with gud leve, as I may pick occasion;  
that sall I, marry.

The pleasure to Shakespeare in setting down these words seems abvious.

An example of the great poetic beauty is a comparison of verses from  
~~EE~~ Ecclesiastes 12 in Henry VIII "Great Bible" - followed by the authorized or  
King James.

"Or ever the silver lace be taken away, or the gold band be broke,  
or the pot broke at the well and the wheel upon the cistern, then  
shall the dust be turned again unto earth from whence it came, and  
the spirit shall return to God which gave it. All is but vanity  
saith the preacher, all is but plain vanity."

King James: "Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the cistern: then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. Vanity of vanities saith the preacher; all is vanity."

When the English came to our American colonies it was, perforce, <sup>with</sup> a blend of English as spoken by proper Londoners, the cockney, Dutch, Irish, Scots, - and the pidgin English from over the world. The "o" in words like not, top, ~~hot~~ and lot was not rounded as the British do, but became flat as we say! Words ending in ile as fertile (to the British) became fertal in Amrica. Emphasis on syllables was changed as detail and re'search in Britain, but detail and research in America.

In our pre-Constitution period, American English was influenced and enriched by words such as chipmunk, hickory, moose, terrapin, hominy, persimmon, totem, papoose, squaw, moccasin - all from the native Indians. The Dutch influence is seen in place names: Brooklyn, Harlem, Bronx and familiar words like waffle, chocolate, caboose, even poppycock - from a Dutch word meaning "Soft dung". Following Shakespeare in the seventeenth century English grew even more to accomodate ~~the~~ descriptions of developments in science and mathematics.

It had to complete with Latin and Greek with their regular systems of grammar spelling and style. John Dryden, one of the finest English stylists of this period, is quoted as having said he sometimes had to compose an idea in Latin to find a correct way to write it in English. Another writer said:

"Poets that lasting marble seek,  
Must carve in Latin or in Greek,  
We write in Sand....



Efforts were being made to standardize English, both spelling and pronunciation. The English Bible and book of prayers being repeatedly read in churches proved to be a kind of standard, especially for the common people. To cure the chaos of spelling, it was seriously suggested that all words be spelled as pronounced. But even close neighboring communities could have such varying sounds for the same words that it was realized this could lead to even more confusion. The English language continued the process of acquiring new words and expressions and giving new meaning to familiar words.

The art of printing had a strong and continuing influence to a standard spelling; radio (and later TV) had a similar effect in molding standards of pronunciation. Since English language has been by far the dominant tongue for radio broadcasts (worldwide) both by BBC and its counterparts, and our major networks and Voice of America broadcasts, it has become the one language that everyone has begun to understand and use. American movies have gone everywhere as have our scientists, business people and military, always speaking English and being better understood as time passed. This rapid spread has really taken place since the time of World War II and the years when Edward R. Murrow began his <sup>oa</sup> broadcasts from London.

One of the earliest and most thorough dictionaries of English was by Samuel Johnson, published 1755. Two of his definitions are often quoted:

"Heart" - The muscle which by its contractions and dilation propels the blood through the course of its circulation ... It is supposed in popular language to be the seat sometimes of courage, sometimes of affection.

"Oats" - A grain which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people."

An unusual example of many tricky definitions is the twelve that may be given for "thought".

1. The operation of the mind; the act of thinking.
2. Idea, image formed in the mind.
3. Sentiment; fancy, imagery.
4. Reflection; particular consideration.
5. Conception; preconceived notion.
6. Opinion; judgment.
7. Meditation; serious consideration.
8. Design; purpose.
9. Silent contemplation.
10. Solicitude; care; concern.
11. Expectations.
12. A small degree; a small quantity.

Some words by their pronunciation or emphasis can have different meanings, for example:

Uh huh and huh

When someone tells us somethings, to indicate attentiveness and agreement we often interject with "uh huh", but when a negative response is desired we say Uh huh, or use the same words to express caution or shame.

Apparently the Scots and Irish tongues had many similarities. Both influenced but were overwhelmed and submerged into English. Robert Burns, and Sir Walter Scott, did most to preserve Scots in literature and preserve it as a national culture. <sup>Today it</sup> ~~it still~~ survives in parts of Scotland. Stone and bone still sound as "stane and bane". In a word such as give the v's are dropped and it becomes gie. Then ba for ball, seek for sick. The well known "How now brown cow" becomes "Hoo noo broon coo?"

In Irish there is aversion to a strong affirmative; to answer "yes" to a request seemed too abrupt, even rude. A research student gave this example.

"Suppose I asked someone if he would like to sing. If he answered "yes", I would feel he was agreeing out of politeness or a sense of duty. If he said "I would" I would know that his agreement was a little more enthusiastic, but I would only be certain of his wholehearted participation if I heard: "Indeed I would, I would indeed, surely".

Most of us have owned a shoe we call a brogue. We have also heard spoken what is called the Irish Brogue; which is to say that an Irishman speaks with a shoe in his mouth.

In my reading and studies for this paper there was a map of North America from Mexico to the most northerly parts of Canada. The thirteen English colonies along the Atlantic seaboard seemed to occupy so little of this vast area that it could hardly be counted, say about 2% of the total, with the vast central area being French, and the western parts through and beyond present Mexico being Spanish. That these English colonies could unite themselves, gain independence, agree on a constitution (whose bicentennial we have just honored) and spread their English - or American English language to all the territory in our first 48 states - and beyond - seems little short of a miracle.

The early settlers and later immigrants to this very day were people who in the majority had little education and when speaking or writing (as only few were able) would use words, pronunciation and grammar without thought or concern for precise correctness.

Fortunately, there were dedicated scholars in our land, who had more than a casual interest in words. Thomas Jefferson was one of these. He had a fascination for words and in his measured English writing often used words of his own creation, one such being the word "belittle"; a word much ridiculed in London at the time.

Benjamin Franklin had to teach himself to read and write. When he was barely out of his teens, he had come to possess a collection of books. How many he did not say (perhaps less than 50 or maybe a few more) but he did relate that on several occasions after moving to a new city, when his books arrived by ship, the event became town talk, and would earn him an

invitation to visit a top official such as Governor or Mayor. Obviously, there were few persons interested in books and a young man of such a bent was worthy of special attention and encouragement.

Noah Webster gave up law for teaching so he could make a living. In his work with school children, he emphasized both spelling and pronunciation. To him is due the change from tyre to tire - defence to defense, to omit the u in color, the extra "g" in wagon. He urged good articulation, the deliberate sounding of every syllable. This is why we would say SECRETARY while the British say "Secret'ry. His great American Dictionary of the English Language, published in 1828 sold only 2,500 copies, forcing Webster to mortgage his home to finance a second edition. He died in 1843, without the recognition he deserved.

The writing of Mark Twain, familiar to each of us, is considered to record the clear voice of American speech. Listen to words from the first page of Huckleberry Finn:

"You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, but that aint no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain and he told me the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly or the Widow, or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly - Tom's Aunt Polly, she is - and Mary and the Widow Douglas is all told about in that book, which is mostly a true book, with some stretchers, as I said before."

Our American English has been enriched by the waves of people coming from Europe; the Irish starting in the 1830's, Germans from 1840, then Italians, Middle Europeans, and Scandinavians (1870). A Norwegian family

family sfter staking a land claim in South Dakota in the 1870's exulted that they had more land than the King of Norway!

For us who live in a county that has always had a large black population it seems more than appropriate to set down some comments on Black English. Scholars of the subject assert that it is a form of pidgin or pidgin English. Sailors on an English vessel with an English captain were likely of several different tongues and tended to adopt a corrupted form of English that had many sounds or characteristics of their own language. When in foreign ports to trade with natives - the Far East, Africa, etc., it was a pidgin language that was used, and that the natives began to acquire.

Natives of West Africa who were to be victims of the slave trade had some knowledge of pidgin English before being sold into slavery. Expressions such as "You out the game" and "He fast in everything" illustrate the omission of a verb form. In black English to say "he working" means "he is busy right now", but to say "he be working" means "he had a steady job". A black woman on being interviewed about Black English reported "I would say: Well, go and bring me some water". Old people say: "Go fetch me some water, gal, I thirsty". Examples I may give of black English will not seem strange to any of this society.

Ho'oped for helped

Hoccum for how come

Shorz for sure is (shorz a bute!)

Uncle Remus Stories show black English in a wonderful way - "One day atter Brer Rabbit fool 'im wid dat calamus root, Brer Fox went ter wuk en got im some tar, en mix it wid some turpentine, en fix up a contrapshun wat he call a Tar-Baby, en tuck dish yer Tar-Baby en he sot 'er in de big road, enden he lay off in de bushes fer ter see wat de news wuz gwinter be."



Even today "bad" - (pronounced baa-ad) can mean "very good"; mean can denote "excellent".

What is to become of our language in five, ten or twenty years? We ~~change~~ know it is changing and will continue to do so. Many critics say for the worse! We know it would be impossible for a poet of today to write, "the choir of gay companions". Other use HAS destroyed its once standard and pleasant meaning. The word exceptional is another among possible thousands, whose meaning has been corrupted from meaning only superior qualities to meaning inferior as well as superior.

We witness a departure from "Standard English" in many situations; but coming from college presidents, from the news columns of the New Era or other familiar places, it seems deplorable. New words and phrases are constantly being made available to us. Some are acceptable in conversation but not in formal writing. The decision sometimes seems difficult.

-Frank Frost  
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The Story of English - Robt McCrum, Wm Crax, Robt MacNeil  
Enap Britanico  
The Heritage Dictionary  
Wm Safire - NY Times, et al