

The latin influence on english vocabulary history essay



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Languages acquire new words in many different ways. They are able to borrow from other languages, create new words through affixation, create new words through compounding, shorten old words, and complete other processes to create new words. The English language has borrowed many different words from other languages to create new words. Latin, Greek, Old Norse, French, and many other languages have all been borrowed from to create new English words. Throughout the years English has been a constant borrower from other languages, but Latin stands out as having made the biggest impact on the English lexicon. The English language has borrowed numerous words from Latin, and it is difficult to read any type of English text that doesn't contain at least a few words derived from Latin. Latin has also affected English grammar, but it has played a bigger role in the expansion of the English lexicon. Latin began its influence on the English language long before English was an established language, and it continues its influence even today. The role that Latin has played in the creation of new English vocabulary during the Old, Middle, and Early Modern periods of English is especially intriguing.

The influence of Latin on the English language began long before the English language ever came to England, and this influence continued throughout the Old English period. Cable and Baugh break down this Latin influence on Old English vocabulary to three different periods: borrowings by Germanic tribes before the invasion of Britain, Celtic borrowings, and borrowings that came with the Christianization of Britain (Baugh & Cable, 2002, pp. 79-83). The earliest influence of Latin on the English language would have to be the influence that the Romans had on early Germanic tribes while they were still

located on mainland Europe. Before the Germanic tribes invaded Britain, they had contact with Romans due to trade and war. The Germanic tribes were bordered by the Roman Empire and were heavily influenced by their presence. According to Gerry Knowles, “ Early contact between the Germanic peoples and the Roman world involved trade, and this is illustrated by tracing the Latin word *caupo*, which originally meant ‘ innkeeper’, but came to refer more generally to a trader” (Knowles, 2005, p. 20). From this period, Old English receives the following words from Latin: *ceap* ‘ bargain’, *mynet* ‘ coin’, *win* ‘ wine’, *must* ‘ new wine’, *cytel* ‘ kettle’, and *sigel* ‘ necklace’ (Baugh & Cable, 2002, p. 80). All of these words were borrowed from Roman traders or from Germanic merchants and are based on the Latin versions of the word. Thus, when the Germanic invaders invaded Britain, they had already been influenced by the Romans and had already begun to use certain Latin words in their language. Also, Roman soldiers were not only from Rome, and we can surmise that Roman armies would have been composed of Germanic peoples. These Germanic soldiers were immersed into Roman culture; therefore, they were adopting Latin words into their own language. Dieter Kastovsky states, “ These soldiers and their families thus became familiar with Latin military terminology, with the names of everyday objects in use in camp and town, and of plants and animals they had not seen before or had no name for, and thus gradually several hundred Latin words penetrated into the various Germanic dialects” (Kastovsky, 1992, pp. 301-302).

Cable and Baugh’s second period accounts for the smallest amount of Latin that was borrowed by English. Latin was introduced to the Celts with

Caesar's invasion of Celtic Britain in 55 B. C. During the almost 350 years of Roman control of Britain, there were numerous people who spoke Latin, but there were not enough speakers to cause Latin to survive in Britain once the Romans returned to Rome (Baugh & Cable, 2002). It should also be noted that although we consider the Roman invaders to be fluent Latin speakers, that may not have been the case for every soldier. Roman soldiers were from all parts of the Roman Empire, and they spoke a variety of different languages (Knowles, 2005). It would be logical to think that when the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes arrived in 449 that they would borrow thousands of words from the Celts and that some of these borrowed words would have to be Latin, but this is not the case. Even though the Romans ruled Celtic Britain for many years and lent many Latin words to the Celts, the Germanic invaders of Britain would hardly borrow any Latin from the conquered Celts (Baugh & Cable, 2002). There were some borrowings though. According to Baugh and Cable (2002), one of the words that was probably picked up from Latin was *castra* 'camp' (p. 82). Kastovsky (1992) states, "How many Latin loans were incorporated by the Germanic settlers in this period is a matter of dispute and much depends on the assessment of the linguistic situation that prevailed in Britain when the Anglo-Saxons arrived" (p. 304). This dispute concerns how long Latin survived in Britain after the Romans left. Some researchers believe that spoken Latin existed after the Romans left; however, others believe when the Romans went back to defend Rome, they took their language with them (Kastovsky, 1992). The researchers who believe that Latin still existed after the departure of the Romans also believe that it is possible that upper-class Britains still used Latin to communicate (Crystal, 2005). Regardless of which theory is to be believed, the Germanic

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invaders lived a separate life from the conquered Celts, and thus didn't borrow an influential amount of their language; therefore, this period accounts for the lowest number of Latin words being borrowed by the English language.

When St. Augustine landed in 597, he brought not only Christianity, but he also reintroduced Latin to Britain. Naturally, as England became a Christian country, Latin would begin to have an even stronger influence on Old English vocabulary. This introduction to Christianity created modern English such words as: abbot, alms, altar, hymn, litany, priest, psalm, and tunic from Latin (Baugh & Cable, 2002). It is easy to see that most of these words are of a churchly origin, but the Anglo-Saxons also borrowed words for household items, clothing, and educational terms (Baugh & Cable, 2002). Latin would have even a greater effect as the Anglo-Saxons began to discontinue the use of runes and start to use the Latin alphabet (Donoghue, 2008). This would seem to allow for an even greater number of Latin words to be borrowed by the English language. Originally, Latin would have only been transmitted verbally, but now that the Latin alphabet was being used to write, the Anglo-Saxons could borrow both from written and spoken word. Cable and Baugh (2002) separate this Christian influence into the earlier influence and the influence after the Benedictine Reform. The difference in the borrowings after the Reform was the fact that most of the words were “ abstract, scholarly, or technical” (Crystal, 2005, p. 62). Although religious words were continually borrowed during the Benedictine Reform, general everyday use words are missing. Latin influenced the early, middle, and late periods of Old English, and it continued this influence into the period of Middle English.

Although this period of Middle English begins with the Norman Conquest and is most notable for its French influence, Latin words were still being borrowed. It should also be noted that many of the borrowed French words were originally derived from Latin words. During this period there were some direct borrowings from Latin, but these were not as popular as the words borrowed from French (Baugh & Cable, 2002). During the Middle English period, Latin gave English such words as: client, conviction, discuss, essence, folio, imaginary, instant, library, medicine, and quadrant (Algeo, 2010, p. 251). Clearly, there would be numerous borrowings of religious words due to the continued use of Latin by the Catholic Church; furthermore, according to Baugh and Cable, John Wycliffe's translation of the bible borrowed over a thousand words from Latin (2002). Latin was also known as the language of intellectuals and was still being taught in schools, albeit through French. As can be seen from the list above, the Latin borrowings were not restricted to only religious words. Although there have obviously been numerous Latin borrowing during the Middle English period, researchers have difficulty following the exact etymology of certain words of this period because of the relationship between English, French, and Latin. Students, who spoke English at home, were studying Latin via French, and their Latin pronunciations and spellings were probably French (Crystal, 2005). Even if a word was borrowed directly from Latin, it would be difficult to clearly say that it is a direct borrowing because it may be pronounced in a French manner. Besides spelling and pronunciation, there was also a problem with word combinations. David Crystal asks, " If an English author encounters a Latin word and decides to use it with a French suffix, then what should we call it?" (Crystal, 2005). This question is difficult to answer and is another reason why <https://assignbuster.com/the-latin-influence-on-english-vocabulary-history-essay/>

it is difficult to show an exact number of Latin words that were borrowed during this period. A third problem was that French was borrowing Latin words at the same time, and the English borrowings may have been because of both the Latin and French languages (Baugh & Cable, 2002). These three problems all cause difficulties in determining exactly how a word entered into English use. Despite these difficulties, it is clear that thousands of Latin words were borrowed during the Middle English period, but it is the early Modern English period that most Latin borrowings take place.

Latin continues its influence on English vocabulary through the period of early Modern English. The sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries account for most of the Latin words that are still used today. The English Renaissance, starting at around 1500, began a period of intense borrowing of words from other languages. Latin was still the strongest lender of new words. Although English was known as the language of popular literature, it should be remembered that Latin was the language of scholars and still used by scholars all over Europe (Baugh & Cable, 2002, pp. 203-204). Because English was not looked at as a scholarly language, many words were borrowed from Latin and French at this time (Crystal, 2005, p. 288); for example, abdomen, area, compensate, data, decorum, imitate, series, sinecure, ultimate, and vindicate were all borrowed during the early Modern English period (Algeo, 2010, p. 251). According to David Crystal (2005), "There had been a steady trickle of Latin borrowings into English throughout the Middle English period, but during the fifteenth century their number greatly increased, and in the sixteenth century they became so numerous, along with words from Greek, that the character of the English lexicon was

permanently altered”(p. 288). During the It is clear that this period accounts for most of the borrowings from Latin. This was a time of great writing and many writers were borrowing directly from Latin. These borrowings, called ink-horn terms, were often overused (Crystal, 2005), and although some critics did protest the use of Latin borrowings, they didn't really have an effect on the number of borrowings that were still appearing in English. The Latin borrowings during this period gave English speakers a vast amount of choices when it came to word selection. This was an era when the written Latin language was responsible for many new additions to English and the authors Sir Thomas Elyot and Sir Thomas More are responsible for hundreds upon hundreds of words that they borrowed from Latin (Baugh & Cable, 2002, p. 229). It is almost impossible to determine the exact number of Latin words that were beginning to appear in English during the early Modern era, but David Crystal (2005) surmises that 75% of all words borrowed during this period come from Latin (p. 289). The first few centuries of the Modern English period were provided with countless new words due to the borrowing of Latin.

Latin has had an enormous influence on English vocabulary, and this influence can be historically and linguistically traced from before the Germanic invaders arrived in what would later be known as England. Even if it is difficult to determine if some words were borrowed directly from Latin, we know that Latin borrowings have played an enormous role in the creation of Modern English. This influence continued thorough all periods of English and even continues today. The English language would be unrecognizable if we were to not use words of Latin origin. Although English is clearly a

Germanic language and doesn't belong in the Romance family, it will be forever bound to Latin.