

History of English (4): The Spread of Modern English 1600-2008

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The English language in 1611

- Why pick 1611?
- 1611 was the date of the King James Bible (the so-called “Authorized version”).
- 1611 English is recognizably the same language as modern English, with just a few differences (see next slide.)
- The vocabulary in 1611 reflects the European Renaissance, but not the scientific vocabulary of the Enlightenment or the influence of voyages of discovery.
- It is a language based on a blend of West Germanic, French, Norse, and Latin.
 - 1611 English has few borrowings from exotic languages.
- It was given shape as a literary language by Chaucer (1340-1400), Tyndale's Bible (1525), Shakespeare, and others.

17th century English

- A few striking differences from present-day English:
- **Grammar:** Old verb forms were still used informally
 - *So thou sayest; so he saith; he speaketh to thee*, etc.
- The distinction between simple tenses (*she smiles/smiled*) and continuous aspect (*she is/was smiling*) had not yet fully developed.
 - But we do find phrases like “*six lords a-leaping*”.
 - The continuous passive (e.g. “*he is/was being treated well*”) did not develop till the 19th century.
- **Pronunciation:**
 - Would have sounded to us rather like a south-western dialect.
 - Pre-consonantal /r/, final /ed/ were often fully pronounced.

Metaphysical conceits

- The poets John Donne (1572-1631), George Herbert (1593-1633), Andrew Marvell (1621-78), and others of the 17th century loved to play with concepts (“conceits”) in a manner that Samuel Johnson called “metaphysical”.
 - Often involving outrageous use of metaphor and puns
 - A delight in using the potential absurdities of language to make attention-grabbing meanings
- The metaphysical poets are typical of the transition from the high culture of the Renaissance to the more scientific and philosophical attitudes of the European Enlightenment.

Examples of conceits

- Second stanza of *The Flea*, by John Donne:

Oh stay! Three lives in one flea spare

Where we almost, yea more than married are.

This flea is you and I, and this

Our marriage-bed and marriage-temple is.

- See <http://lardcave.net/hsc/2eng-donne-flea-comments.html>

- From a letter by Sir Christopher Wren to his wife (c. 1670):

I have sent your watch at last & envy the felicity of it, that it should be soe near your side & soe often enjoy your Eye.....but have a care for it, for I have put such a spell into it that every Beating of the Balance will tell you 'tis the Pulse of my Heart, which labors as much to serve you and more trewly than the Watch; for the Watch I beleeve will sometimes lie, and sometimes be idle & unwilling...but as for me you may be confident I shall never.

Voyages of discovery

- The East India Company, founded in 1600 to trade by sea with India and other eastern countries
 - Treaty of friendship negotiated in 1615 with the Mughal emperor Jahangir in Delhi
 - By 1698 the company had a virtual monopoly of trade with India.
 - In 1757 the Company beat the French at Plassey and gained control of Bengal.
 - It became the only commercial institution ever to rule an empire.
- Effect on the English language – many borrowings from Indian languages (Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, etc.)
- Effect on India, which developed its own national variety of English, which is still an official language of India

The English language in India

- *calico* (= cotton cloth, < Malayalam, 1540)
- *chintz* (= a brightly coloured cotton cloth, < Hindi, 1614)
- *punch* (= a kind of hot mixed drink, < Hindi, 1600)
- *curry* (= a kind of spicy dish, < Tamil, 1598, 1685)
- *pariah* (= 'outcast; untouchable', < Tamil, 1613)
- *coolie* (= 'workman' < Tamil, 1622)
- *crore* (= 10 million (rupees)) and *lakh* (= 100 thousand (rupees)) (1620s, > Hindi) are still only used in Indian English.
- *Join duty, bed tea, quarters*, are English expressions with particular meanings in India and Pakistan.

Voyages of intellectual discovery

- The *Royal Society* "for the promotion of Physico-Mathematicall Experimental Learning"
 - founded officially in 1662, though its founding members had held meetings informally before then.
 - In 1668, John Wilkins presented his *Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language*
 - Aimed to create a truly scientific language
 - Strong influence on Leibniz
 - Wilkins also designed a precursor of the metric system, but it was not taken up

A universal scientific language

- Wilkins' *Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (1668) – was parodied thus:

A Doctor counted very able
Designes that all Mankynd converse shall,
Spite o' th' confusion made att Babell,
By Character call'd Universall.
How long this character will be learning,
That truly passeth my discerning. ...

—*The ballad of Gresham College*

- Wilkins also designed a precursor of the metric system, but it was not taken up.

Growth of the scientific vocabulary

- Words of Greek etymology, mostly modern coinages:
 - *adenoids, anemia, appendicitis, appendectomy, cephalotomy, gastrectomy, brachygraphy* (= shorthand), *agrammatism, dyslexia, hormones, hysteria ...*
 - *electrons, proteins, carbohydrates,*
- *Words of Latin origin, often with new meanings:*
 - *ultraviolet, inhibition, fundamentalist, feminism, prefabricated*
- *Hybrid coinages such as television, aquaphobia, bigamy, hyperactive, liposuction, monolingual*
- *Words of Arabic origin:*
- *algebra, alcohol, amalgamate, arsenal, chemistry (alchemy), harem, houri, indigo, magazine*

The desire to 'fix' the language

- The belief that English in c. 1700 had reached the height of perfection
- Proposals by Dryden, Swift, and others to set up an Academy on the French model, to control language change and to rule against slang and informal usage
- came to nothing, partly because of Johnson's dictionary (next slide).

Samuel Johnson's dictionary (1755)

- Based on citations from “the best authorities”.
- “Those who have been persuaded to think well of my design require that it should fix our language...
- “When we see men grow old and die ... we laugh at the elixir that promises to prolong life to a thousand years; and with equal justice may the lexicographer be derided who, being able to produce no example of a nation that has preserved their words and phrases from mutability, shall imagine that his dictionary can embalm his language and secure it from corruption and decay.” —Preface, *Dictionary*, 1755

The Oxford English Dictionary (1878-1928); 3rd edition now in progress

- The aim was (and is) not prescriptive, but rather to compile an inventory of all the words the language.
 - A theoretical problem with this, as the vocabulary is dynamic (constantly growing and changing);
 - people invent new words all the time;
 - few of the new inventions survive.
- The ultimate challenge to OED is a work like James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.

American English

- *caucus* = a private political meeting. First recorded in 1763 in the diary of John Adams (Boston, Mass.) etymology unknown, possibly from an Algonquin word
- *tomahawk* = American Indian battle axe, [1612] 1705
- *barracuda* = a kind of ferocious fish > Am. Spanish, 1678
- *truck* (Br. lorry), *fender* (Br. bumper), *hood* (Br. bonnet) *trunk* (Br. boot); many other auto engineering terms
- *pacifier* (child's dummy), *diapers* (nappies)
- See <http://www.englishclub.com/vocabulary/british-american.htm>

Australian English

- animal terms, e.g. *kangaroo* (1770), *dingo* (1789), *wombat* (1798), *kookaburra* (1890)
- Landscape features, e.g. *billabong* (1865), = stagnant pool of water.
 - surprisingly few borrowed terms for plants and trees
- Cultural artefacts: *didgeridoo* (1924), *boomerang* (1827)
- *Australian slang and informal English*:
 - *hard yakka* = hard work (1888)
 - *bung*, adj. = useless, broken: *He's got a bung leg*
 - *G'day* = a greeting
 - *bastard* = person, thing (not derogatory)

South African English

- *witblits* > Afrikaans, 1934. literally 'white lightning' = moonshine (home-made alcoholic drink)
- *veld* > Afrikaans, 1785, 1835 = high, dry, open country. cognate with English *field* (which originally had this meaning; the sense 'enclosed land' is Middle English)
- *trek* > Afrikaans, 1850. noun and verb. = '(to make) a long, hard journey'
- *mamba* > Zulu, 1860. a kind of snake.

New Zealand English

- *haka* > Maori, 1832 = a ceremonial war dance
- *kumara* > Maori, 1772 = sweet potato, yam
 - [see OED for the etymology of *yam*]
- *kakapo* > Maori, 1843 = a kind of NZ parrot
- *kanuka* > Maori, 1906 = a kind of small tree with white flowers

Caribbean English

- Huge amount of dialect variation, from island to island
 - See Richard Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*
 - *Tendency to creolization; patois pronunciation*
- *reggae*, in English contexts 1968; possibly > Yoruba
- ska (= fast reggae), 1964
- *rude boys* = (Jamaica) petty gangsters, 1976
- *Rastafarian* = member of a religious group who believe that Ras Tafari, 1892-1975 (alias Haile Selassie, emperor of Ethiopia) is God Incarnate.
Rasta English is very inventive:
 - *ganja* (> Hindi, 1800); *dread*; *righteous ire*; *feelin' irie* (1980); the Irator (= Creator *dreadlocks* (1960), *I and I* (= we, us; “*police hunt I an' I down*”)
 - avoidance of syllables with negative connotations, so *apprecilove* for *appreciate* (avoiding [h]ate), *livication* for *dedication*

Summary – English from 1600 to 2000

- Technological expansion and scientific discovery
 - Invented “scientific” words from Greek
- Maritime expansion and trade
 - Borrowed words from other contemporary languages, some of them exotic, rare or extinct
- It became a world language
 - A truly international lingua franca – the first since the death of Latin in the Renaissance
 - Many distinctive but mutually comprehensible national varieties

Is English the most important world language?

- It is not the most widely spoken language in the world.
- See “The English Language, an International Medium of communication”