

~ Module 13, Session 2 ~

A Brief History of Written English

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Brief History of Written English

English is a dynamic, constantly changing language, with numerous historical forces shaping its development.

NOTE: Information on historical periods and events in the following slides comes from: Henderson, E., (1990); Henry, M. K., 2003; King, D. H., 2000; & Nist, J., (1966).

Pre-English, 54 BCE – 450 CE

54 B.C.E. Julius Caesar defeats the Celts

50 C.E. Roman Emperor Claudius I colonizes Britain; Celtic & Roman languages co-exist.

450 C.E. Romans leave Britain; Jutes, Angles & Saxons invade.

Middle English, 450-1150

- 600 Roman alphabet reintroduced by Christian missionaries.
- 878 The Danes (Norsemen/Vikings) invade England & King Alfred defeats them.
- 900 Old English reaches its literary peak.
- 1000 The Danes invade and win, but Anglo-Saxon continues to dominate.
- 1066 William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy invades Britain; Norman French becomes the official language of state while English is the language of the people.

Middle English, 1150-1500

- 1350 English becomes the official language of state when Edward III becomes king.
- 1400 Geoffrey Chaucer dies, leaving his classic *The Canterbury Tales*.
- 1420 King Henry V writes in Middle English.
- 1475 English borrows from Latin and Greek during the Renaissance. William Caxton begins printing in English.

Modern English, 1600 - Present

- 1600 Queen Elizabeth I & William Shakespeare write in English.
- 1755 Samuel Johnson compiles the first comprehensive dictionary of English.
- 1828 Noah Webster compiles a dictionary of American English
- 1857-1928 *The Oxford English Dictionary* is developed in parts, and finally completed in 1928.

Words Continue to Form

Westward Movement brings: *cantankerous*, *caboodle*, & *rambunctious*.

Food words from a variety of countries bring *tacos*, *burritos*, & *chile* (Mexico); *brie* & *bouillabaisse* (France); *chow mein* & *won ton* (China); *sushi* & *teriyaki* (Japan).

Technology continues to expand with words like *bandwidth*, *videocassette*, *microbyte*, & *astronaut*.

Words such as *baby boomer*, *couch potato*, *awesome*, *hunk*, *channeling*, & *airhead* enter the culture.

NOTE: Sources for new words: Lederer, R., (1991); & Soukhanov, A. H. (1995).