**Ural Scientific Centre (LYCEUM).**

## Ural Gorky University

### Scientific work

Performed by:

Pupil of 11e form of LYCEUM

Pokrovsky Pavel

Director:

Stolyarova Nelli Aleksandrovna

Teacher of English language of LYCEUM.

Yekaterinburg.

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**1.English Language.**

**English Language**, chief medium of communication of people in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and numerous other countries. It is the official language of many nations in the Commonwealth of Nations and is widely understood and used in all of them. It is spoken in more parts of the world than any other language and by more people than any other tongue except Chinese.

English belongs to the Anglo-Frisian group within the western branch of the Germanic languages, a sub-family of the Indo-European languages. It is related most closely to the Frisian language, to a lesser extent to Netherlandic (Dutch-Flemish) and the Low German (Plattdeutsch) dialects, and more distantly to Modern High German. Its parent, Proto-Indo-European, was spoken around 5,000 years ago by nomads who are thought to have roamed the south-east European plains.

**2.Vocabulary**

The English vocabulary has increased greatly in more than 1,500 years of development. The most nearly complete dictionary of the language, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (13 vols., 1933), a revised edition of *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (10 vols., 1884-1933; supplements), contains 500,000 words. It has been estimated, however, that the present English vocabulary consists of more than 1 million words, including slang and dialect expressions and scientific and technical terms, many of which only came into use after the middle of the 20th century. The English vocabulary is more extensive than that of any other language in the world, although some other languages—Chinese, for example—have a word-building capacity equal to that of English. It is, approximately half Germanic (Old English and Scandinavian) and half Italic or Romance (French and Latin) and extensive, constant borrowing from every major language, especially from Latin, Greek, French, and the Scandinavian languages, and from numerous minor languages, accounts for the great number of words in the English vocabulary. From Old English have come cardinal and ordinal numbers, personal pronouns, and numerous nouns and adjectives: from French have come intellectual and abstract terms, as well as terms of rank and status, such as duke, marquis, and baron. In addition, certain processes have led to the creation of many new words as well as to the establishment of patterns for further expansion. Among these processes are onomatopoeia, or the imitation of natural sounds, which has created such words as *burp* and *clink;* affixation, or the addition of prefixes and suffixes, either native, such as *mis-* and *-ness,* or borrowed, such as *ex-* and *-ist;* the combination of parts of words, such as in *brunch,* composed of parts of *breakfast* and *lunch;* the free formation of compounds, such as *bonehead* and *downpour;* back formation, or the formation of words from previously existing words, the forms of which suggest that the later words were derived from the earlier ones—for example, *to jell,* formed from *jelly;* and functional change, or the use of one part of speech as if it were another, for example, the noun *shower* used as a verb, *to shower.* The processes that have probably added the largest number of words are affixation and especially functional change, which is facilitated by the peculiarities of English syntactical structure.

**3.Spelling**

English is said to have one of the most difficult spelling systems in the world. The written representation of English is not phonetically exact for two main reasons. First, the spelling of words has changed to a lesser extent than their sounds; for example, the *k* in *knife* and the *gh* in *right* were formerly pronounced (see Middle English Period below). Second, certain spelling conventions acquired from foreign sources have been perpetuated; for example, during the 16th century the *b* was inserted in *doubt* (formerly spelled *doute*) on the authority of *dubitare,* the Latin source of the word. Outstanding examples of discrepancies between spelling and pronunciation are the six different pronunciations of *ough,* as in *bough, cough, thorough, thought, through,* and *rough;* the spellings are kept from a time when the *gh* represented a back fricative consonant that was pronounced in these words. Other obvious discrepancies are the 14 different spellings of the *sh* sound, for example, as in *anxious, fission, fuchsia,* and *ocean.*

**4.Role of Phonemes**

Theoretically, the spelling of phonemes, the simplest sound elements used to distinguish one word from another, should indicate precisely the sound characteristics of the language. For example, in English, *at* contains two phonemes, *mat* three, and *mast* four. Very frequently, however, the spelling of English words does not conform to the number of phonemes. *Enough,* for example, which has four phonemes (*enuf*), is spelled with six letters, as is *breath,* which also has four phonemes (*breu*) and six letters. *See* Phonetics.

The main vowel phonemes in English include those represented by the italicized letters in the following words: b*i*t, b*ea*t, b*e*t, b*a*te, b*a*t, b*u*t, b*o*tany, b*ou*ght, b*oa*t, b*oo*t, b*oo*k, and b*u*rr. These phonemes are distinguished from one another by the position of articulation in the mouth. Four vowel sounds, or complex nuclei, of English are diphthongs formed by gliding from a low position of articulation to a higher one. These diphthongs are the *i* of b*i*te (a glide from *o* of b*o*tany to *ea* of b*ea*t), the *ou* of b*ou*t (from *o* of b*o*tany to *oo* of b*oo*t), the *oy* of b*oy* (from *ou* of b*ou*ght to *ea* of b*ea*t), and the *u* of b*u*tte (from *ea* of b*ea*t to *oo* of b*oo*t). The exact starting point and ending point of the glide varies within the English-speaking world.

**5.Stress, Pitches, and Juncture**

Other means to phonemic differentiation in English, apart from the pronunciation of distinct vowels and consonants, are stress, pitch, and juncture. Stress is the sound difference achieved by pronouncing one syllable more forcefully than another, for example, the difference between *' record* (noun) and *re' cord* (verb). Pitch is, for example, the difference between the pronunciation of *John* and *John?* Juncture or disjuncture of words causes such differences in sound as that created by the pronunciation of *blackbird* (one word) and *black bird* (two words). English employs four degrees of stress and four kinds of juncture for differentiating words and phrases.

**6.Inflection**

Modern English is a relatively uninflected language. Nouns have separate endings only in the possessive case and the plural number. Verbs have both a strong conjugation—shown in older words—with internal vowel change, for example, *sing, sang, sung,* and a weak conjugation with dental suffixes indicating past tense, as in *play, played.* The latter is the predominant type. Only 66 verbs of the strong type are in use; newer verbs invariably follow the weak pattern. The third person singular has an *-s* ending, as in *does.* The structure of English verbs is thus fairly simple, compared with that of verbs in similar languages, and includes only a few other endings, such as *-ing* or *-en;* but verb structure does involve the use of numerous auxiliaries such as *have, can, may,* or *must.* Monosyllabic and some disyllabic adjectives are inflected for degree of comparison, such as *larger* or *happiest;* other adjectives express the same distinction by compounding with *more* and *most.* Pronouns, the most heavily inflected parts of speech in English, have objective case forms, such as *me* or *her,* in addition to the nominative (*I, he, we*) and possessive forms (*my, his, hers, our*).

**7.Parts of Speech**

Although many grammarians still cling to the Graeco-Latin tradition of dividing words into eight parts of speech, efforts have recently been made to reclassify English words on a different basis. The American linguist Charles Carpenter Fries, in his work *The Structure of English* (1952), divided most English words into four great form classes that generally correspond to the noun, verb, adjective, and adverb in the standard classification. He classified 154 other words as function words, or words that connect the main words of a sentence and show their relations to one another. In the standard classification, many of these function words are considered pronouns, prepositions, and conjunctions; others are considered adverbs, adjectives, or verbs.

**8.Development of the Language**

Three main stages are usually recognized in the history of the development of the English language. Old English, known formerly as Anglo-Saxon, dates from AD 449 to 1066 or 1100. Middle English dates from 1066 or 1100 to 1450 or 1500. Modern English dates from about 1450 or 1500 and is subdivided into Early Modern English, from about 1500 to 1660, and Late Modern English, from about 1660 to the present time.

**8.1.Old English Period**

Old English, a variant of West Germanic, was spoken by certain Germanic peoples (Angles, Saxons, and Jutes) of the regions comprising present-day southern Denmark and northern Germany who invaded Britain in the 5th century AD; the Jutes were the first to arrive, in 449, according to tradition. Settling in Britain (the Jutes in Kent, southern Hampshire, and the Isle of Wight; the Saxons in the part of England south of the Thames; and the Angles in the rest of England as far north as the Firth of Forth), the invaders drove the indigenous Celtic-speaking peoples, notably the Britons, to the north and west. As time went on, Old English evolved further from the original Continental form, and regional dialects developed. The four major dialects recognized in Old English are Kentish, originally the dialect spoken by the Jutes; West Saxon, a branch of the dialect spoken by the Saxons; and Northumbrian and Mercian, subdivisions of the dialects spoken by the Angles. By the 9th century, partly through the influence of Alfred, king of the West Saxons and the first ruler of all England, West Saxon became prevalent in prose literature. The Latin works of St Augustine, St Gregory, and the Venerable Bede were translated, and the native poetry of Northumbria and Mercia were transcribed in the West Saxon dialect. A Mercian mixed dialect, however, was preserved for the greatest poetry, such as the anonymous 8th-century epic poem *Beowulf* and the contemporary elegiac poems.

Old English was an inflected language characterized by strong and weak verbs; a dual number for pronouns (for example, a form for “we two” as well as “we”), two different declensions of adjectives, four declensions of nouns, and grammatical distinctions of gender. These inflections meant that word order was much freer than in the language today. There were two tenses: present-future and past. Although rich in word-building possibilities, Old English was sparse in vocabulary. It borrowed few proper nouns from the language of the conquered Celts, primarily those such as *Aberdeen* (“mouth of the Dee”) and *Inchcape* (“island cape”) that describe geographical features. Scholars believe that ten common nouns in Old English are of Celtic origin; among these are *bannock, cart, down,* and *mattock.* Although other Celtic words not preserved in literature may have been in use during the Old English period, most Modern English words of Celtic origin, that is, those derived from Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, or Irish, are comparatively recent borrowings.

The number of Latin words, many of them derived from the Greek, that were introduced during the Old English period has been estimated at 140. Typical of these words are *altar, mass, priest, psalm, temple, kitchen, palm,* and *pear.* A few were probably introduced through the Celtic; others were brought to Britain by the Germanic invaders, who previously had come into contact with Roman culture. By far the largest number of Latin words was introduced as a result of the spread of Christianity. Such words included not only ecclesiastical terms but many others of less specialized significance.

About 40 Scandinavian (Old Norse) words were introduced into Old English by the Norsemen, or Vikings, who invaded Britain periodically from the late 8th century on. Introduced first were words pertaining to the sea and battle, but shortly after the initial invasions other words used in the Scandinavian social and administrative system—for example, the word *law*—entered the language, as well as the verb form *are* and such widely used words as *take, cut, both, ill,* and *ugly.*

**8.2.Middle English Period**

At the beginning of the Middle English period, which dates from the Norman Conquest of 1066, the language was still inflectional; at the end of the period the relationship between the elements of the sentence depended basically on word order. As early as 1200 the three or four grammatical case forms of nouns in the singular had been reduced to two, and to denote the plural the noun ending *-es* had been adopted.

The declension of the noun was simplified further by dropping the final *n* from five cases of the fourth, or weak, declension; by neutralizing all vowel endings to *e* (sounded like the *a* in Modern English *sofa*), and by extending the masculine, nominative, and accusative plural ending *-as,* later neutralized also to *-es,* to other declensions and other cases. Only one example of a weak plural ending, *oxen,* survives in Modern English; *kine* and *brethren* are later formations. Several representatives of the Old English modification of the root vowel in the plural, such as *man, men,* and *foot, feet,* also survive.

With the levelling of inflections, the distinctions of grammatical gender in English were replaced by those of natural gender. During this period the dual number fell into disuse, and the dative and accusative of pronouns were reduced to a common form. Furthermore, the Scandinavian *they, them* were substituted for the original *hie, hem* of the third person plural, and *who, which,* and *that* acquired their present relative functions. The conjugation of verbs was simplified by the omission of endings and by the use of a common form for the singular and plural of the past tense of strong verbs.

In the early period of Middle English, a number of utilitarian words, such as *egg, sky, sister, window,* and *get,* came into the language from Old Norse. The Normans brought other additions to the vocabulary. Before 1250 about 900 new words had appeared in English, mainly words, such as *baron, noble,* and *feast,* that the Anglo-Saxon lower classes required in their dealings with the Norman-French nobility. Eventually the Norman nobility and clergy, although they had learned English, introduced from the French words pertaining to the government, the church, the army, and the fashions of the court, in addition to others proper to the arts, scholarship, and medicine. Another effect of the Norman Conquest was the use of Carolingian script and a change in spelling. Norman scribes write Old English *y* as *u* and *u* as *ou.* *Cw* was changed to *qu,* *hw* to *wh,* and *ht* to *ght.*

Midland, the dialect of Middle English derived from the Mercian dialect of Old English, became important during the 14th century, when the counties in which it was spoken developed into centres of university, economic, and courtly life. East Midland, one of the subdivisions of Midland, had by that time become the speech of the entire metropolitan area of the capital, London, and probably had spread south of the Thames River into Kent and Surrey. The influence of East Midland was strengthened by its use in the government offices of London, by its literary dissemination in the works of the 14th-century poets Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower, and John Lydgate, and ultimately by its adoption for printed works by William Caxton. These and other circumstances gradually contributed to the direct development of the East Midland dialect into the Modern English language.

During the period of this linguistic transformation the other Middle English dialects continued to exist, and dialects descending from them are still spoken in the 20th century. Lowland Scottish, for example, is a development of the Northern dialect.

# 8.3The Great Vowel Shift

The transition from Middle English to Modern English was marked by a major change in the pronunciation of vowels during the 15th and 16th centuries. This change, termed the Great Vowel Shift by the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen, consisted of a shift in the articulation of vowels with respect to the positions assumed by the tongue and the lips. The Great Vowel Shift changed the pronunciation of 18 of the 20 distinctive vowels and diphthongs of Middle English. Spelling, however, remained unchanged and was preserved from then on as a result of the advent of printing in England in about 1475, during the shift. (In general, Middle English orthography was much more phonetic than Modern English; all consonants, for example, were pronounced, whereas now letters such as the *l* preserved in *walking* are silent).

All long vowels, with the exception of /i:/ (pronounced in Middle English somewhat like *ee* in *need*) and /u:/ (pronounced in Middle English like *oo* in *food*), came to be pronounced with the jaw position one degree higher. Pronounced previously in the highest possible position, the/i:/ became diphthongized to “ah-ee”, and the/u:/ to “ee-oo”. The Great Vowel Shift, which is still in progress, caused the pronunciation in English of the letters *a, e, i, o,* and *u* to differ from that used in most other languages of Western Europe. The approximate date when words were borrowed from other languages can be ascertained by means of these and other sound changes. Thus it is known that the old French word *dame* was borrowed before the shift, since its vowel shifted with the Middle English /e:/ from a pronunciation like that of the vowel in *calm* to that of the vowel in *name.*

**8.4.Modern English Period**

In the early part of the Modern English period the vocabulary was enlarged by the widespread use of one part of speech for another and by increased borrowings from other languages. The revival of interest in Latin and Greek during the Renaissance brought new words into English from those languages. Other words were introduced by English travellers and merchants after their return from journeys on the Continent. From Italian came *cameo, stanza,* and *violin;* from Spanish and Portuguese, *alligator, peccadillo,* and *sombrero.* During its development, Modern English borrowed words from more than 50 different languages.

In the late 17th century and during the 18th century, certain important grammatical changes occurred. The formal rules of English grammar were established during that period. The pronoun *its* came into use, replacing the genitive form *his,* which was the only form used by the translators of the King James Bible (1611). The progressive tenses developed from the use of the participle as a noun preceded by the preposition *on;* the preposition gradually weakened to *a* and finally disappeared. Thereafter only the simple *ing* form of the verb remained in use. After the 18th century this process of development culminated in the creation of the progressive passive form, for example, “The job *is being done*”.

The most important development begun during this period and continued without interruption throughout the 19th and 20th centuries concerned vocabulary. As a result of colonial expansion, notably in North America but also in other areas of the world, many new words entered the English language. From the indigenous peoples of North America, the words *raccoon* and *wigwam* were borrowed; from Peru, *llama* and *quinine;* from the West Indies, *barbecue* and *cannibal;* from Africa, *chimpanzee* and *zebra;* from India, *bandanna, curry,* and *punch;* and from Australia, *kangaroo* and *boomerang.* In addition, thousands of scientific terms were developed to denote new concepts, discoveries, and inventions. Many of these terms, such as *neutron, penicillin,* and *supersonic,* were formed from Greek and Latin roots; others were borrowed from modern languages, as with *blitzkrieg* from German and *sputnik* from Russian.

**8.5.20th-Century English**

In Great Britain at present the speech of educated persons is known as Received Pronunciation. A class dialect rather than a regional dialect, it is based on the type of speech cultivated at public schools and at such of the older universities as Oxford and Cambridge. Many English people who speak regional dialects in their childhood acquire Received Pronunciation while attending school and university. Its influence has become even stronger in recent years because of its use by such public media as the British Broadcasting Corporation.

RP is not intrinsically superior to other varieties of English, and is, itself, only one particular dialect. It has just achieved more extensive use than others.

Widely differing regional and local dialects are still employed in the various counties of Great Britain. Other important regional dialects have also developed; for example, the English language in Ireland has retained certain individual peculiarities of pronunciation, such as the pronunciation of *lave* for *leave* and *fluther* for *flutter;* certain syntactical peculiarities, such as the use of *after* following forms of the verb *be;* and certain differences in vocabulary, including the use of archaic words such as *adown* (for *down*) and Celtic borrowings such as *banshee.* The Lowland Scottish dialect, sometimes called Lallans, first made known throughout the English-speaking world by the songs of the 18th-century Scottish poet Robert Burns, contains differences in pronunciation also, such as *neebour* (“neighbour”) and *guid* (“good”), and words of Scandinavian origin peculiar to the dialect, such as *braw* and *bairn.* The English spoken in Australia, with its marked diphthongization of vowels, also makes use of special words, retained from English regional dialect usages, or taken over from indigenous Australian terms.

**8.6.American English**

An important development of English outside Great Britain occurred with the colonization of North America. American English may be considered to include the English spoken in Canada, although the Canadian variety retains some features of British pronunciation, spelling, and vocabulary. The most distinguishing differences between American English and British English are in pronunciation and vocabulary. There are slighter differences in spelling, pitch, and stress as well. Written American English also has a tendency to be more rigid in matters of grammar and syntax, but at the same time appears to be more tolerant of the use of neologisms. Despite these differences, it is often difficult to determine—apart from context—whether serious literary works have been written in Great Britain or the United States/Canada—or, for that matter, in Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa.

**8.7.Basic English**

A simplified form of the English language based on 850 key words was developed in the late 1920s by the English psychologist Charles Kay Ogden and publicized by the English educator I. A. Richards. Known as Basic English, it was used mainly to teach English to non-English-speaking persons and promoted as an international language. The complexities of English spelling and grammar, however, were major hindrances to the adoption of Basic English as a second language.

The fundamental principle of Basic English was that any idea, however complex, may be reduced to simple units of thought and expressed clearly by a limited number of everyday words. The 850-word primary vocabulary was composed of 600 nouns (representing things or events), 150 adjectives (for qualities and properties), and 100 general “operational” words, mainly verbs and prepositions. Almost all the words were in common use in English-speaking countries; more than 60 per cent were one-syllable words. The abbreviated vocabulary was created in part by eliminating numerous synonyms and by extending the use of 18 “basic” verbs, such as *make, get, do, have,* and *be.* These verbs were generally combined with prepositions, such as *up, among, under, in,* and *forward.* For example, a Basic English student would use the expression “go up” instead of “ascend”.

**8.8.Pidgin English**

English also enters into a number of simplified languages that arose among non-English-speaking peoples. Pidgin English, spoken in the Melanesian islands, New Guinea, Australia, the Philippines, and Hawaii and on the Asian shores of the Pacific Ocean, developed as a means of communication between Chinese and English traders. The Chinese adopted many English words and a few indispensable non-English words and created a means of discourse, using a simple grammatical apparatus. Bкche-de-Mer, a pidgin spoken in the southern and western Pacific islands, is predominantly English in structure, although it includes many Polynesian words. Chinook Jargon, used as a lingua franca by the Native Americans, French, and English on the North American Pacific coast, contains English, French, and Native American words; its grammatical structure is based on that of the Chinook language. The use of pidgin is growing in Africa, notably in Cameroon, Sierra Leone, and East Africa.

**9.Future of the English Language**

The influence of the mass media appears likely to result in a more standardized pronunciation, more uniform spelling, and eventually a spelling closer to actual pronunciation. Despite the likelihood of such standardization, a unique feature of the English language remains its tendency to grow and change. Despite the warnings of linguistic purists, new words are constantly being coined and usages modified to express new concepts. Its vocabulary is constantly enriched by linguistic borrowings, particularly by cross-fertilizations from American English. Because it is capable of infinite possibilities of communication, the English language has become the chief international language.[[1]](#endnote-1)

1. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)