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HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND SPREAD OF ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

There has never been a language like English. Mother tongue to around 375 million people and second language to many hundreds of millions more, the first language of business and the internet, English is truly a world-wide language. English has a unique position as the essential language skill for the world, for it is in English that the world is communicating. It is the prime beneficiary of the world-wide communications revolution and the only language ever to have achieved global status. In recorded history – in a little over one-thousand five-hundred years - it has grown from the local dialect of a minor Germanic tribe of a few thousand people living in the north of continental Europe to become the most widespread language ever. Never before has any language achieved the status now enjoyed by English, nor could this dominance have been predicted. How English has become the global language is a natural area for enquiry.

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The history of English is a well-worked topic. A survey of the catalogues of major research languages around the world – including those in countries whose first language is not English - shows that in the last two-hundred years English has been by far the most academically studied language ever, yet even this enormous scholarly effort did not predict the present success of English. With hindsight the key stages which have led to the development of the language may be established, and the story told of how English has grown from an Indo-European dialect to its present global dominance. This chapter presents an over-view of the development and spread of English in terms of seven key stages. Each is exemplified by a brief text, and the impact of that stage on the development of global English is set out. Of these stages one is prehistoric, four are mediaeval, and only two belong to the modern world. The first five of the seven steps took place before English began its global spread, the sixth made it a world language, and the seventh transformed it into the one global language.

1 THE HERITAGE OF INDO-EUROPEAN

Text 1: August Schleicher's *Avis Akvasas Ka* in the 1997 version of Winfred Lehmann and Ladislav Zgusta. Date circa 4000BC. Author's translation.

Gwrei owis, kwesyo wlhna ne est, ekwons espeket, oinom ghe gwrum woghom weghontm, oinomkwe megam bhorom, oinomkwe ghmenm oku bherontm. Owis nu ekwobhyos ewewkwet: Ker aghnutoi moi ekwons agontm nerm widntei. Ekwos tu ewewkwont: Kludhi, owei, ker aghnutoi nsmei widntbhyos: ner, potis, owiom r wlhnam sebhi gwhermom westrom kwrneuti. Neghi owiom wlhna esti. Tod kekluwos owis agrom ebhuget.

On a hill a sheep that had no wool saw horses, one of them pulling a heavy wagon, one carrying a big load, and one carrying a man quickly. The sheep said to the horses: "My heart pains me, seeing a man driving horses". The horses said: "Listen, sheep, our hearts pain us when we see this: a man, the master, makes the wool of the sheep into a warm garment for himself. And the sheep has no wool". Having heard this, the sheep fled into the plain.

That English is an Indo-European language is frequently stated, yet the significance is generally overlooked: in Indo-European we find the key syntactic features which are found in forms of English spoken around the world today. Around six thousand years ago the language that is the direct ancestor of English was something like the reconstructed text above, a recent updating of August Schleicher's famous *Avis Akvasa Ka – The Sheep and the Horses*.

No-one ever spoke quite the language of *Avis Akvasas Ka*. Indo-European is a language reconstructed using the best efforts of countless philologists working in the neo-grammarian tradition. Today we might even debate whether there was one single Indo-European language, or if there was instead a group of disparate languages growing together through processes of language contact. Yet *Avis Akvasas Ka* remains a useful aid for understanding the very earliest roots of English. Not quite this language reconstructed by Schleicher but rather something very like it was articulated by someone around six thousand years ago. These speakers of this ancestor of English were farmers, presumably inhabiting a location in central Asia. Their language was recognisably the ancestor of English. For example the sounds of the language were broadly similar to those of modern English, while much of the vocabulary was cognate with modern forms, and the basic structure of the language familiar to speakers of modern Indo-European languages. It has a

tense and aspect system not so very different to English, as well as declension of nouns of the sort once found in English and now well represented by many other Indo-European languages. It permits the formation of new words by compounding, the putting together two or more existing words in much the same way as English. Its syntax, like that of English, is dominated by the subject-verb-object pattern for declarative main clauses, with rules for inversion in some other clause types. A careful reading of *Avis Akvasas Ka* reveals numerous roots now found in English, as well as roots found in other Indo-European languages. Thus for example the title could be glossed root-by-root to yield *the ewes, the equines too*, which just about makes sense in English.

2 THE ORIGIN OF ENGLISH

Text 2 *Caedmon's Hymn*, Northumbrian Version, circa 650AD. Author's translation.

Nu scylun hergan hefaenricaes uard,
metudæs maecti end his modgidanc,
uerc uuldurfadur, sue he uundra gihuaes,
eci dryctin, or astelidæ.
He aerist scop aelda barnum
heben til hrofe, haleg scepen;
tha middungeard moncynnæs uard,
eci dryctin, æfter tiadæ
firum foldu, frea allmectig.

Give praise to the Guardian of the Kingdom of Heaven, to the might of the Creator in His creation, to the work of the World-Father! It is He, the Lord Everlasting, who created every wonder. First of all He, the Holy Shepherd, created the heavens as a roof for the sons of men; then afterwards the Guardian of Mankind, the Lord Everlasting, God Almighty created for mortal men this middle earth.

The migration of Germanic tribes to the British Isles is conventionally dated from AD449, the year when the brothers Hengist and Horsa landed at Ebbsfleet in Kent on the invitation of the Romanised British. They came as mercenaries to fight for the Britons against Picts and Scots, but finding the British Isles to offer fertile farmland and regarding the indigenous Britons as poor warriors, they sent back to their homeland for their kin to come to Britain. The annals of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* describe a series of battles in which the Germanic peoples had the victory, with the Britons fleeing from them. While doubtless a simplification, there is at least some truth in the story told in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and AD449 is an established date from

which to reckon Germanic settlement of Britain, though not an absolute date. There had been Germanic peoples living in the British Isles for around two-hundred years before this date, and therefore a Germanic Language which is the ancestor of English spoken in parts of the British Isles from at least the middle of the third century AD. Yet the movement of people starting from AD449 is significant because it brought to the Britain many thousands of Germanic-speaking people, enough to consolidate what became the English language in the British Isles.

Traditional views of the English migration from the continent to the British Isles overwhelming the previous indigenous Celtic population have been modified by recent advances in genetic profiling and archaeology. It is now accepted that there was an ethnic and cultural merging of Celtic and English peoples, yet this merging is almost totally absent from the language record. In terms of vocabulary less than a dozen words (and possibly as few as one – *druid*) passed at this time from Celtic to English, and while a few Celtic and even pre-Celtic place-names were retained the overwhelming majority of pre-Settlement place-names in lowland Britain – upwards of 95% – were lost. There appears to date to be no plausible explanation advanced for this state of affairs, and modern parallels seem absent. Whatever the reason, the English language totally displaced all Celtic and any other languages within the areas of English settlement.

The language these Germanic migrants spoke is the ancestor of English, but can hardly be called English. Even the scholarly convention of calling it Old English or Anglo-Saxon is no more than a convenience. The concept of an English people and an English language did not exist at this time. Rather there were a number of Germanic tribal groupings speaking a language which, in as much as they thought of it at all, was simply the Northern Speech – in contrast to the Southern or Latin of Rome, the Western or Celtic languages of parts of the British Isles, and the Eastern or Slavonic languages of Eastern Europe. Nineteenth century philologists divided Germanic into three groups – west, north and east – and most subsequent writers have continued the distinction. Yet it is misleading. The languages spoken throughout the early Germanic world – in the Germanic heartlands of Britain, Scandinavia, Northern Europe, Eastern Europe, the Alps and North Italy – were all mutually comprehensible, and may all be regarded as dialects of one common language until at least the early twelfth century. Thus West-Germanic speaking England accepted North-Germanic Danish speaking kings without linguistic difficulty, while sources as diverse as the *English Battle of Maldon* and the Icelandic *Heims Kringla* demonstrate contemporary views that there was just one language. It is with the Anglo-Saxon invasion of England that forms of this Germanic "Northern Speech" were brought to Britain.

The English settlement brought not one unified language but several distinct dialects. Conventional references to three tribes, the Jutes, Angles and Saxons, are reflected in three dialects, Kentish, Anglian and Saxon. At no

time in its history, not even at its point of origin, has the English of the British Isles shown dialectal unity. Nor were these dialects particularly close one to the other. The Anglian settlers of Northumbria spoke a dialect clearly different from that of the Saxons in Wessex or the Jutes in Kent – indeed comparative philology based on place-names shows that through an accident of migration patterns the dialect of Northumbria was closest to that of the Lombards who had settled many hundreds of miles away in northern Italy, so two of the locations furthest apart in the Germanic world spoke similar dialects.

The concept of an English nation and an English language belongs to the work of Bede. The Venerable Bede, the outstanding intellectual of the Golden Age of Northumbria, perceived the British Isles as a natural geographical unit, a view reinforced by his political masters, the Kings of Northumbria, whose imperial aspirations led to them styling themselves "Rulers of Britain". It was a view further strengthened by the Church, which notionally saw all of Britain as one missionary field governed from Canterbury. Bede called all the Germanic peoples in the British Isles English, and extended this designation to their language. It is Bede who first separates English from the other Germanic dialects and treats it as a separate language.

It is to Bede that we owe the survival of *Caedmon's Hymn*, which he states is the very first writing in the English language. In his account this song is presented not in English but in a Latin translation, and the preservation of the original English we owe to scribes scribbling in the margin the English version of what must have been a popular song. Written in the early Northumbrian dialect of English, it is the earliest text of any length in any of the Germanic languages, and quite reasonably regarded as the first text in the language which Bede called English. To the reader of Modern English it is not readily accessible, with its language perhaps even harder to follow than Schleicher's Indo-European. Yet this is the direct ancestor of English in its many forms as spoken today.

Caedmon's Hymn is a fully wrought work of art, which therefore stands at the head of a long tradition of literature in English. Bede, its first translator, himself commented that the song will not adequately translate, and any translator who struggles with the poem will agree with him. English is shown as a rich and complex language. Here, as in other early texts, is an extensive vocabulary, almost exclusively Germanic in etymology, a declension system extant though already reduced from its Germanic origins, rich word-order patterns conveying both meaning and emphasis, modest agglutination, and a fast evolving system of marking tense. This tense development is a special feature of the early history of English, for at its start tense was restricted, with aspectual distinctions expanding the range of meaning. As English developed the range of tenses expanded greatly.

It is with *Caedmon's Hymn* that English enters history as a recorded language, the only written vernacular of the early Middle Ages. And it is with Caedmon's Hymn that it is first appropriate to speak of an English language.

3 VIKING IMPACT

Text 3 – Beowulf circa 900AD. Author's translation.

Hwæt! We Gardena	in geardagum,
þeodcyninga,	þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æþelingas	ellen fremedon.
Oft Scyld Scefing	sceaþena þreatum,
monegum mægþum,	meodosetla ofteah,
egsode eorlas.	Syððan ærest wearð
feasceaft funden,	he þæs frofre gebad,
weox under wolcnum,	weorðmyndum þah,
oðþæt him æghwylc	þara ymbsittendra
ofer hronrade	hyran scolde,
gomban gyldan.	þæt wæs god cyning!

Listen! We Danes have heard tell of the deeds of the kings of our people in the days of old, and how those princes showed great courage. Often Scyld, Scef's son, in defeating his enemies from many nations, over-turned their high seats, so terrifying their leaders. In recompense for his birth (when he was found destitute) he received consolation, growing under the heavens, prospering in honour, until every one of his neighbours over the whale-riding obeyed him and paid him tribute. He was a good king!

The Viking invasion of Britain in the ninth and tenth centuries AD had a traumatic effect on the language. Danish Viking control of the eastern and northern counties of England – the Danelaw – was supported by mass migration from Scandinavia, primarily Denmark. In Scotland and the west of England the fertile, coastal land was settled by the Norwegian Vikings, while in Ireland, the city of Dublin was founded by them as a great trading city. Under King Canute, king of England, Norway and Denmark, England became part of a Viking North Sea empire.

The linguistic environment which developed was that conventionally called a mixed language community, though perhaps better in this instance called a mixed dialect community. This is a community where all members gain a high degree of proficiency in both forms of speech, resulting in a mixing of the two languages, in this case of Old English and Old Norse forms. In England a mixed language emerged both because of the large numbers of Vikings who migrated to Britain, frequently matching the numbers of indigenous English, and because of the proximity of the two languages as

effectively dialects of one language. The two are so close that speakers of the two could understand one another, though with significant difficulty, and they recognised their language to be one common tongue. In an environment where English and Vikings were mixed at every level of society, bilingualism – or perhaps better bi-dialectism – was usual. The closeness of Old English and Old Norse means that today the identification of the language of origin of Germanic words in English is very difficult. Very many basic words in Modern English are agreed as being from Old Norse, famously those beginning with the characteristically Norse *sk-* sound, as *sky*, *skull* and *skin*. *Egg*, *leg* and a host of other basic words are also conventionally attributed to Old Norse. Even words as basic as pronouns entered the language from Old Norse – *they* is Old Norse, while *she* is an Old Norse influenced modification of Old English *heo*. Where a word is the same in Old English and Old Norse it has been the convention of etymologists to assume that the word is derived from Old English – this is the practice of the Oxford English Dictionary – yet there is no necessary reason why this should be the case. Thousands of words conventionally attributed to Old English may in fact have come equally from identical forms in Old Norse.

Particular problems were found with the English inflectional system. Developments in the sound system of Old English and Old Norse since their separation had created real differences in the inflections of the two languages, with the result that the use of an inflectional ending rarely helped in conveying meaning. Alongside inflection, both languages used word-order to convey meaning, and these word-order patterns were very similar. Even before the Vikings arrived the Old English inflectional system had been responding to the redundancy inherent in using both an inflectional and word-order system through a long period of inflectional reduction. The impact of Old Norse simply accelerated this process – the inflection of English was greatly reduced.

It is the impact of Old Norse on Old English that set in train the crucial developments which characterised the next five hundred years of the development of English.

4 1066 AND THE IMPACT OF FRENCH

Text 4 – The Pearl. Anonymous. Date circa 1380. Author's translation.

Perle, pleasaunte to prynces paye
To clanly clos in golde so clere,
Oute of oryent, I hardyly saye,
Ne proued I neuer her precios pere.
So rounde, so reken in vche araye,
So smal, so smoþe her sydes were,
Quere-so-euer I jugged gemmes gaye,

I sette hyr sengeley in synglere.
Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere;
Þurs gresse to grounde hit fro me yot.
I dewyne, fordolked of luf-daungere
Of þat pryuy perle wythouten spot.

Behold the Pearl, pleasing for the Prince to set in perfection in brightest gold. I can say for sure that among all the pearls of the orient I have never found her precious equal. So round, so radiant in every setting, so small and so smooth, that whenever I looked at gay gems I set her apart, unparalleled. Alas! I lost her in a garden. Through the grass to the ground she fell from me. I grieve, wounded by great love for my spotless Pearl.

1066, the year of the Norman conquest of England, has pivotal importance in the development of English history and culture, and has frequently been credited with a similarly pivotal role in the development of the language. The great movement of French and Latin vocabulary into English was promoted by the Norman conquest, though some of this would have come anyway through the church and through contact with mainland Europe. The mixed language environment of the years following the conquest promoted significant changes in English.

The Norman invaders spoke Norman French, a language still very close to the Vulgar Latin from which it had evolved; some also spoke Old Norse testifying to their kinship with Denmark and the lands of the north from which they took their name, as well as their claim to the throne of England. Though comprising only a small proportion of the population the Norman victors established themselves as a ruling class, with Norman French the court language. While before 1066 the language of writing in England was English, afterwards it was almost never English, rather usually Latin, and sometimes French, with all English kings being first-language French speakers from 1066 to 1399. It is in this change of written custom that the Norman invasion has its greatest impact on English, for it is through the conquest that English lost its written standard. When English was again used for writing the conventions of standard spelling, standard grammar and even standard vocabulary which had developed in the Old English period based on the late West-Saxon of Winchester had broken down completely. Had the Normans not invaded we would still be speaking a form of English, but with a standard based on the Winchester of King Alfred.

The Pearl springs out of this linguistic confusion of a loss of a standard written form. The language is Middle English, the English of the high Middle Ages; the poem was written in the North-West of England in the vicinity of today’s Manchester and represents the local dialect of that area. It benefits from a new wealth of vocabulary, with French and Latin words freely added

to the language alongside the native Germanic, and flourishes within the new cultural environment which takes its values both from the Germanic north and the Christian, Mediterranean south. Thus the poet's grief for his daughter is expressed through southern Christian allegory, while northern concepts manifest themselves as in the essentially untranslatable *luf-daungere*, overpowering love.

Three-hundred years after the Norman conquest, *The Pearl* is a convenient illustration both of how much and how little has changed with the English language. At first glance the developments since the age of *Beowulf* are striking. Virtually all the words have equivalents in today's English, in contrast with the lexical obscurity of perhaps a majority of the words in *Beowulf*. Many of the words derive from Romance sources, in marked contrast with the near-exclusive Germanic roots of *Beowulf*. The morphology too is modern, with verbs approximating to a modern tense system and with declension mostly lost. Yet this air of modernity is juxtaposed by an alliterative system of versification that goes back to *Beowulf*, to Caedmon and beyond, and a predisposition towards one or two syllable words. This is English in the Germanic tradition, English showing the heritage of the languages of both King Alfred and King Canute. It is also a language that is without a standard, without an established literature, and with a multiplicity of dialects which frequently hindered communication, a much weaker language than that which had existed a few centuries earlier.

5 THE STANDARDISATION OF ENGLISH

Text 5 – Geoffrey Chaucer: General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales. Date circa 1387.

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote	sweet
The droghte of march hath perced to the roote,	drought
And bathed every veyne in swich licour	
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;	
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth	
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth	
Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne	
Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne,	run
And smale foweles maken melodye,	
That slepen al the nyght with open ye	
(so priketh hem nature in hir corages);	
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,	
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,	
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;	shrines
And specially from every shires ende	
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,	

The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke. helped

The multitude of dialects of English in the British Isles in the high Middle Ages created linguistic instability, and pressure for standardisation.

There is nothing simple about the dialect map of the high Middle Ages. While Old English can reasonably be divided into four or five dialects (Northumbrian, Mercian, West-Saxon, Kentish and perhaps Essex), the work of the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* shows that Middle English is represented by four or five hundred dialects. The differences between them were substantial, and today it is possible to locate a text from the period to within a few square miles, typically to a particular town or scriptorium. There are countless dialect continua running through this multiplicity of dialects, with broadly the Midland dialects being the most readily understood throughout the English-speaking area, and the dialects of Kent, the South-West, the North and Scotland to varying degrees presenting difficulties for mutual comprehension.

The situation was unstable, with in-built pressure for standardisation to meet the needs of the nation state of England. The standard which did develop is what we have come to think of as London English, yet its origin was outside of London. It owed much to dialects spoken some fifty miles north of London, the so-called south-central-midlands dialects, which were comprehensible throughout England, yet it is far too simple to see standard English simply as a development of this one dialect group. Rather the development needs to be seen in terms of a growing together of dialects within a triangle bounded by London, Oxford and Cambridge. The prestige of these three cities, along with the resulting migration of people into them and between them, promoted a congruence of dialects. The population of London included many from Essex, Sussex and Kent, representing southern dialects; Oxford included people speaking dialects from the West Midlands, while Cambridge included speakers of East Midland and East Anglian dialects. The new standard that developed was used by the elite in these cities. It was a form of English which avoided the distinct individual features of each of this multiplicity of dialects. As the London civil service started to write in English – instead of Norman French or Latin – they used the emerging standard, giving it prestige.

As a Londoner and a member of the mercantile elite, Geoffrey Chaucer used the new standard dialect. In doing so he wrote in a form of English which is the direct ancestor of modern English, and therefore readily accessible to modern readers.

That Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* has become a cornerstone of English literature has much to do with its ready intelligibility maintained for over six-hundred years. Chaucer is writing in a form of English which we still read without too many difficulties, in contrast for example with his

contemporary *The Pearl* poet. The vocabulary, grammar and syntax of Chaucer are largely unchanged in the modern language, and Chaucer is closer to modern standard English than is for example the modern Lowland Scots dialect of Aberdeenshire. The language of Shakespeare, Spencer and Milton is the direct descendant of the language of Chaucer, as is the language of the English Bible, and even the English language of the internet. Conventionally Chaucer is described by critics (following Edmund Spenser) as "the pure well of English, undefiled", and this familiar characterisation is just. The English we know, all the World Englishes, start with Chaucer and his generation of Londoners. Their action at the end of the fourteenth century in adopting a particular dialect for their own convenience has had enormous consequences for English.

From the start of the fifteenth century two sorts of English can be distinguished. One is the standard English of the establishment; the other is the multiplicity of dialects first within the British Isles and later world-wide. While the concept of standard, right and correct English is problematic on very many levels, there has notwithstanding been a long tradition of comparing dialects to the standard, and finding the dialects wanting. Thus in Scotland a hundred years after Chaucer, a country at war with England, the Scots made extensive modifications to the written form of their language to reflect the norms of the new English standard. Through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the written standard gained ground, effectively relegating other forms of English to the status of spoken-only dialects. Texts in dialects of English from this period do exist, but their scarcity only serves to illustrate the pervasiveness of the new written standard. On the eve of the world-wide expansion of English a written standard for English had been established.

6 EARLY-MODERN ENGLISH

Text 6 – The King James Bible. 1611.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

> Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

When in 1603 King James VI of Scots ascended the throne of England as King James I, his new United Kingdom had a diversity of languages. Celtic languages flourished in Wales and the Welsh borders, in Ireland, in Cumberland, the Isle of Man, Cornwall, and in much of Scotland. King James himself spoke not English but *Inglis*, also called Lowland Scots, a form of speech which his English courtiers frequently found incomprehensible. A visiting ambassador described the king's language as being as far removed from English as Portuguese is from Spanish. The English of 1603 was the language of some parts of a single European nation state, with little influence outside the British Isles and much competition within them.

Among the king's first acts on becoming king of England was to authorise a new translation of the Bible into English, a project in which he took a continued and detailed interest. The language of the Bible produced for the whole of King James' United Kingdom is the language of southern England, the language we have come to regard as standard English, and the language which has subsequently been codified by countless lexicographers and grammaticians. The colonial expansion which began in the seventeenth century through the creation of the British Empire took English around the world, and the King James Bible that was the foundation of that linguistic expansion.

In the seventeenth century English expanded to Ireland through migration of English speakers from Scotland, and through imposition of an English speaking administration. The Irish language retreated "beyond the pale", the boundary of the county of Dublin, beginning a steady process of decline in the face of advancing English. In North America English was established on the eastern seaboard of what is now the United States, in Newfoundland, Bermuda, in many areas of the Caribbean, and in parts of Honduras, Nicaragua and Columbia. In the Americas, English was in competition with other European languages, particularly French, Spanish and Portuguese, and it was not at that time perceived as having a special status on the American continent.

The eighteenth century saw England expand within the British Isles. In Wales and the Welsh Borders the Welsh language retreated to the central mountains, to the North-West and Anglesey, and to Pembrokeshire. The translation of the Bible into Welsh gave the Welsh language some status, with the result that Welsh is today the most vigorous of the Celtic languages, yet today even Welsh, the direct heir of the language once spoken through most of the British Isles, is a minority language. The century also saw the spread of English to Canada, both the Maritime Provinces and the territories south of Hudson Bay.

Finally the nineteenth century is the period of further rapid growth in the British Empire, and of the resultant spread of English. In this century English reaches Australia and New Zealand, expands in the Caribbean, is taken to the islands of the South Atlantic, to South Africa, and to Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Kenya. It is in the nineteenth century that in India the Raj adopts English for crucial roles in which it has largely been maintained: for trade, for the administration of justice, for administration, for higher education and much secondary education.

As a result of the colonial expansion, mother-tongue English outside of the British Isles falls into four major dialect groups.

North American English has its roots in the language of the first English settlers, but was enormously changed by later migrations, particularly those from Ireland and Scotland in the nineteenth centuries. North American English therefore owes more to the dialects of Irish English and Scots English than to the English of England. Contact with many other languages brought to North America through migration has further modified the English language in America. The twentieth century has seen a process of standardisation which in the first half pulled America towards standard British English and in the second half has seen British English increasingly Americanised. While American English has asserted its own standard, for example through Webster's *Dictionary*, these standards derive from the common international English literary heritage rather than from specific American examples.

Caribbean English similarly reflects the language of the first English settlers, in this case modified by contact with later English settlers and with African languages. The British migration to the Caribbean was mainly English (in contrast to Scottish or Irish), including many members of middle class social groups speaking with the accents of their class, and Caribbean English retains features of middle-class English.

South African English reflects a predominantly nineteenth century migration, and the dialects of the poor from all parts of the British Isles. Contact with Dutch is particularly evidenced in the sounds and vocabulary.

Australia and New Zealand are among the parts of the world most recently colonised by the English, with mass migration continuing until the 1950s. The nineteenth century saw migration largely from the lower socio-economic classes – famously Australia was a penal colony – with migrants from all parts of the British Isles. The English of Australia and New Zealand is the closest of the four broad world dialects to British English.

These various native speaker Englishes outside of the British Isles are all greatly influenced by the language of the social class which comprised the majority of the migrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – save for the middle class derived Englishes of the Caribbean these are all dialects of the British poor. They differ reflecting the region of the British Isles from which the majority of migrants came, and the century of migration.

Alongside these first language dialects are dialects of English which have been created by speakers of English as a second or other language. The major dialects are:

> Indian English, the English of the Indian sub-continent: India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh.
> South-East Asian English. The English of Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, The Philippines.
> African English. The English of the former countries of the British Empire within Africa.

These dialects now have enormous impact on the development of English. Seventy-five countries around the world accord an official status to English, many of them in effect promoting one of these dialects. For every native speaker of English there are around three competent non-native speakers, often located in countries with fast growing economies. There is enormous variation within each of the three broad groups above, as well as between each group, yet they do have one unifying characteristic in that they are learnt forms of English. Frequently they reflect the language of an English-speaking upper class elite, developed by an indigenous elite in each country.

Today the English language world-wide is the lasting legacy both of the British Empire and of American-led capitalism.

7 ENGLISH IN THE BRITISH ISLES TODAY

Text 7 - Toothache in Surrey[1].

‘Oh dear! That is a miserable thing, is toothache. You can't bide nowheres, an' you can't sleep, an' you can't eat. ... There, 'tis a miserable thing ... I 'en't had it for years now, 'r else I 'ave had it terrible bad. I've put baccer in my teeth - I've even gone so fur 's to put it in my ears.’

I shrugged my shoulders. ‘I shouldn't like to do that!’

‘No; you can't bear 't long. But I've done it. Roll it up tight an' soak it in rum an' poke it into yer ear the side where the ache is ... 'T stops the pain for a bit, but it very soon makes yer head begin to jump. Tell ye what's another very good thing now, an' that's a 'orse-radish.’

‘A horse-radish?’

‘Yes; tied round yer wrist.’

‘What's that for?’

‘For toothache.’

‘Well, but -’

[1] George Strutt, The Bettesworth Book: Talks with a Surrey Peasant, 1901

> 'Yes, that's it, sir. Ye see that's where the nerve goes to from yer wrist - up to yer teeth … An' if you gets a horse-radish, and scrapes 'n ye know, and ties 'n tight round yer wrist, 't'll very soon drive the toothache away. But you can't stand it for very long. It doo give to ye. I dunno but what the pain's as bad as the toothache.'

Varieties of English flourish. Today we do not have a global standard, nor even in the restricted geographical area of the British Isles do we have a single form of English. There is of course a *de facto* standard for the written language, supported by the scholarly apparatus of dictionaries and grammars. Even for the spoken language there is a substantial measure of consensus within the media and from speakers, with the South Eastern dialects benefiting from the prestige of London, Oxford and Cambridge and forming an implicit standard. Yet this veneer of standardiation is only a part of the reality of English within the British Isles today. Despite the influence of the South East a great number of different Englishes are found within the British Isles, and a majority of English speakers within the British Isles are using forms that are not standard. Dialect is very much alive in the British Isles today.

Writing more than a century ago in the *Preface* to his *Glossary of Surrey Words*, lexicographer and antiquarian Granville Leveson Gower was convinced that he was recording a dying form of the English language – indeed his only uncertainty was whether the demise of Surrey English would be "a lingering or a speedy execution". For Leveson Gower and his contemporaries, dialect was a quaint imperfection that progress would soon replace by a standard form. Now a century later we can be sure that he was wrong. Dialects have not died out. Surrey dialect in its new manifestation as "Home Counties English" or "Estuary English" or even "South East English" is very much alive, as are the multiplicity of forms of English throughout the British Isles and worldwide. A consequence of their vitality is that much dialect can be readily understood by English speakers, even if they would not themselves use those forms. There is little in the Surrey dialect passage above that presents difficulties of comprehension, though it is more than a hundred years old and was considered archaic when it was recorded. A reading of the text shows that there are many contractions, and a few odd spellings as the recorder has attempted to convey the accent of his informant, but little that is wholly unfamiliar today. Probably strangest to speakers of other Englishes is the characteristic of this English form to use standard English words with a meaning specific to this dialect. Here for example the verb phrase *to give to* has the meaning *to hurt*, which is never its meaning in standard English, though it is found throughout the dialects of the South of England.

Granville Leveson Gower was not himself a speaker of Surrey English, as his social and educational background had taught him what is variously called Public School English, or the Queen's English or Oxford English – what he

and his age considered to be correct, standard English. Leveson Gower was recording the dialect of his estate workers and of the rural poor in his community - he tells us that in his role as a Surrey magistrate he occupied himself when listening to witnesses and defendants by jotting down examples of their Surrey dialect. What Leveson Gower could not have guessed is that a hundred years later the dialects of the South-East of England, that of Surrey among them, would today be refreshing Standard English. It may even be argued that dialects including Surrey are driving the formation of a new standard of spoken English.

Throughout the British Isles, dialect is a significant feature of the speech of a substantial proportion of the population. The past efforts of the educational system and the BBC to impose a standard pronunciation – Received Pronunciation – have not in fact created a standard, with the result that the media now promotes a range of British Englishes. We do have a prestige form of British English in the South East, the form which is the nearest British English approaches to a spoken standard. Yet even here there are forms which are specific to the area, and sound very strange to speakers of English elsewhere in the British Isles.

Among the regional dialects of English in the British Isles, Lowland Scots alone now has a significant body of writing in it, and may in time develop a modern, written standard. With a written pedigree as long as the written history of the English language, and as the vehicle for a superb literary output both mediaeval and modern, Lowland Scots has a proud history. Today it should be regarded less as a remnant in need of preservation, more as a resurgent group of dialects which are gaining in strength. Lowland Scots may be heard in classroom and church, in the Scottish parliament and on the Scottish media. Other Scots-English forms are also ascendant. For example the dialects of Orkney and Shetland are attracting more interest now than for many generations, while the Highlands are becoming increasingly aware of the unique sounds of Highland English. In Northern Ireland, Ulster Scots has been the recipient of substantial funding as part of a project in language planning, promoting this dialect as a part of the heritage of the Ulster Scots community of Northern Ireland. In other contexts within Ireland, Hiberno-English (or Irish-English) is flourishing as a distinct form of expression. Combining forms of English elsewhere archaic with vocabulary and grammar derived from the Celtic Irish language, Hiberno-English is an integral part of the heritage of Ireland. Similarly Welsh-English shows the influence of the Celtic Welsh language as well as the forms of speech which reflect Welsh culture.

Within England the most pronounced dialects are found at the greatest distance from London and the South East. The North of England and the West Country continue rural forms of speech which are markedly different from London and the South-East, while the English Midlands and East Anglia have their own characteristic, rural dialects, though less developed than those of the

North and West Country. English urban dialects are also flourishing: Newcastle, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol and Birmingham are among the cities which have unique forms of English. Public School English, though no longer seen as a standard to be emulated, continues as an upper-class accent throughout England and sometimes beyond.

Migrants to the British Isles have usually created their own Englishes, some with a longer life than others. Romany Gypsies, one of the earliest migrant groups, have produced the only significant creole within the British Isles, Anglo-Romany. An extended process of decreolisation has created a Romany dialect of English, which in turn is contributing to the general word-stock of British Isles English. Curiously this form of speech once considered low prestige is now particularly influencing the high prestige Englishes of the South East. Jewish migration to the British Isles, particularly that of the early nineteenth century, has created a British Jewish English influenced by the vocabulary and syntax of Yiddish. Migrations to the British Isles since the 1950s have had a variable linguistic impact which has included the creation of some distinctive Englishes. Perhaps most marked is the Bengali community of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets which has created a vibrant and distinctive Bengali-English. Chinese-English (based on Cantonese) is an example of the the well-established Englishes; Polish-English represents a new migration and linguistic development which looks set to become established.

Today, as at all times through its history, the English of the British Isles is not a single, standard language, but rather of a profusion of Englishes to which various groups have ownership. The great number of Englishes within the British Isles is now joined by an even greater number of World Englishes created in the global spread of English. The outlook for the twenty-first century is not one of a global, standard English, but rather of World Englishes, a collage of over-lapping accents, dialects, pidgins and creoles, all spoken by more and more of the world's population, both as first and additional languages. There are enormous pressures for standardisation, and perhaps ultimately a global standard will emerge from this complexity. Yet for the foreseeable future we have not one English languages but rather World Englishes.

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