

## THE INFLUENCE OF LATIN IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The history of English Language can be divided into three periods: Old English, Middle English and Modern English. We are going to explain its own characteristics and the effects of the introduction of loans, borrowings and calques of other languages.

### 1. Old English (449-1100)

According to the English professor Albert Baugh, there are three distinct periods when Latin entered the English language:

- Zero period or continental period.
- First period.
- Second period.

#### A. Zero Period or continental period

For several hundred years, the Germans before occupying England, had commercial contacts with the Romans, so Latin words entered the Celtic language in this period (about 170 lexical items). Words related specially to trade and everyday life were introduced: Camp(battle), Weall(wall), Cheap(bargain, cheap), Pund(pound), Winn(wine)...

#### B. First Period

What was the language situation when the English reached in Britain? In the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> C Latin was still the official language of Britain.

For everyday purposes, ordinary people used British which was still a single language. In the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> C and during the 6<sup>th</sup> C Latin survived chiefly among the upper classes and rulers of the Highland zone.

It is not clear how far the early English loans from Latin represent direct borrowings from Latin-speaking Britons; how far they are words which have passed through British to enter Old English or how far they are continental loans. For instance, ancor "anchor", oele "oil", forca "fork".

Mixed population invariably produced hybridization of speech as for example failure to recognize the quantity of long vowels, levelling of genders, the nasal consonant n, loss of inflexions...

#### C. Second Period or Christianity Period

The reintroduction of Latin was effected through the influence of Christianity. St. Augustine was sent with the mission to convert Britain into Christianity. With the help of the King's wife, he converted the king and many lords. Besides, the first church was built in Canterbury and St. Augustine became his first archbishop.

A century before, St. Patrick had Christianized Ireland and founded several monasteries. These monasteries held the cultural and religious leadership in Britain for centuries.

Therefore, the Latin alphabet was introduced, religious works were written in Latin as well as in Old English and Celtic. The semantic fields in which Latin had a major influence were: religion, church organization, education, learning and domestic life. For example: alms, altar, deacon, hymn, minister, master, grammatical...

However, the Latin influence on Old English stopped momentarily at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> C when the Danes (or Vikings as the English called them) began to sack churches and monasteries. As a consequence, church declined as well as education. King Alfred restored churches, founded new monasteries and spread education.

His work was continued by three archbishops who carried into England the Benedictine Reform. It implied the improvement of education, the establishment of school in monasteries and the encouraging of learning among the clergy and the monks.

The linguistic effects of the reform were the introduction of more and more Latin loans and borrowings into the written language like demon; paper (papyrus); cucumber (cucumber).

Most of the loans were nouns as the adjectives and verbs followed Old English word-formation patterns. By the end of the Old English period around 450 words were Latin borrowings and 300 of them passed onto general vocabulary.

## **2. INFLUENCE OF LATIN IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH**

Latin does not stop at the end of the Old English period. Together with French, it had a revival after the Norman Conquest, in the formative period of Middle English.

English borrowed through French which was the language of nobility, law and court. Latin continued to be the language of intellectuals, doctors and investigators. Latin words were also borrowed but they came from ecclesiastical or legal texts.

Besides vocabulary, Latin popularized prefixes (dis- , re- , sub- , pre-...) and suffixes (-able, -ible, -ent, -al...)

Another hallmark in this period is the existence of the three level synonyms: rise-mount-ascent, ask-question-interrogate being the English word the most popular, the French word the most literary and the Latin one, the most learnt.

## **3. INFLUENCE OF LATIN IN MODERN PERIOD**

During Renaissance, there was a great interest in vernacular languages in the Classical world which produced the popularization of works that had been available only to academic men.

Classical works were translated into English and translators did not only translate but they created a literary English language. In some cases, there was a lack of vocabulary in English but instead of borrowing foreign words, they were now "anglicized". For example, they cut the end of the word (consult-are), or they changed the ending (extern-us---external), or they formed verbs from Latin past participle (exterminate)...

But above all, the main characteristic of this period is that Latin borrowings are specially adopted to international vocabulary of science.

## **4 CONCLUSIONS**

To sum up, English language is a Germanic dialect transformed by Latin and Romance languages. Latin influence began in Britain before the English civilization appeared. It was brought by the Roman Empire when Britain was inhabited by the Celts.

The English language was greatly influenced by Latin. English vocabulary is made up of at least 30% of words derived from Latin and since the main difficulty in learning a foreign language is its unfamiliarity, this problem is partially solved as Latin is a common root of Spanish language. Therefore, students may know deduce the meaning of words that have a Latin origin and make the learning of English easy. The difficulty in learning English turns then to pronunciation and spelling.