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FRENCH INFLUENCE ON ENGLISH

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The influence of French on English pertains mainly to its lexicon but also to its syntax, grammar, orthography, and pronunciation. Most of the French vocabulary in English entered the language after the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, when Old French, specifically the Old Norman dialect, became the language of the new Anglo-Norman court, the government, and the elites. That period lasted for several centuries until the aftermath of the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453). However, English has continued to be influenced by French.

It is customary to divide the time in which English was in contact with French into two periods, 1) Anglo-Norman and 2) Central French. The first period lasted from the invasion of 1066 to the loss of Normandy to England under King John in 1204.

After this there is little or no direct influence of French on English but the language remained fashionable and the practice of borrowing words from the continental language continued well into the 15th century. The Central French period (during which influence from the region around Paris dominated) can be taken to cease gradually with the introduction of printing at the end of the 15th century and the general resurgence in interest and status of English.

The region known as *Isle de France* (Paris and its surroundings). The label *Central French* refers to late medieval speech there.

Some few words pre-date the Norman conquest such as *prud* 'proud' and *tur* 'tower'. The greatest influence set in the mid 13th century. The number of borrowings runs into thousands. These are to be found in certain spheres of life like politics and administration, cuisine, the judiciary, etc.

The difference between Anglo-Norman and Central French loans in English is to be seen in famous pairs of words like *catch* and *chase*, both of which go back originally to Latin *captiare*, which itself furnished English with the later loan 'capture'. The main differences between Anglo-Norman and Central French are outline in the tables below.

Anglo-Norman	Central French
/k/	/tʃ/
<i>cattle</i> /k-/	<i>chattels</i> /tʃ/
<i>pocket</i> /-k-/	<i>poach</i> /tʃ/
/tʃ/	/s/
<i>catch</i> /-tʃ/	<i>chase</i> /-s/
<i>launch</i> /-ntʃ/	<i>lance</i> /-ns/
<i>pinch</i> /-ntʃ/	<i>pincers</i> /-ns-/

This type of contrast between two forms of the same etymon is also seen with French and Latin forms as in *royal* and *regal*.

GERMANIC LOANWORDS IN FRENCH French contains a number of words which are early borrowings from Germanic. In Central French these show /g-/ (from an earlier /gw/) and in Anglo-Norman /w/. The word for *war* is the best example; the Germanic root **war-* is to be found in Modern English *aware* and *beware*.

Anglo-Norman	Central French
/w/	/g/
<i>warranty, war</i> /w-/	<i>guarantee</i> (Mod.Fr. <i>guerre</i>) /g/
<i>warden</i> /w-/	<i>guardian</i> /g-/
<i>reward</i> /-w-/	<i>regard</i> /-g/
<i>waste</i> /w-/	Mod.Fr. <i>gâter</i> ‘spoil’

Anglo-Norman /ei/ derives from Vulgar Latin /e/ in a stressed open syllable corresponds to /oi/ in Central French. This fact explains the vowels in the following word pairs.

Anglo-Norman	Central French
/ei/	/oi/
<i>convey</i>	<i>Convoy</i>
<i>display</i>	<i>Deploy</i>

The borrowing of words in the Middle English period is related to changes with French itself. For instance an /s/ before /t/ was lost in French but many loans in English were made before this took place, hence one has *estate* but *état*, *forest* but *forêt* in Modern French. In the case

of *hostel* and *hotel*, the /s/ in the first word shows that it is an older borrowing from the same root, cf. Modern French *hôtel* (the accented vowel in the French examples here indicates that previously an /s/ followed the vowel).

In the course of time the difference between the two strands of French — Norman and Central — became more and more diffuse. Certainly there is no question nowadays of speakers being able intuitively to distinguish between the two.

SPLIT IN ENGLISH VOCABULARY As a generalization one can say that the French loans are to be found on higher stylistic levels in English. With the later Central French borrowings this is obvious given the sectors of society where the loans occurred (see next section). The general split is between colloquial native words and more formal Romance terms and can be seen clearly in word pairs like *forgive* and *pardon*. Other examples are *begin: commence*; *hearty: cordial*; *happiness: felicity*; *help: aid*; *hide: conceal*; *meal: repast* (only literary nowadays).

But for later English the etymological source of words is irrelevant and any two words can form a pair distinguished on a colloquial — formal axis as one can see in *notice: perceive*, both of Romance origin or even in the pair *present: gift* where in fact the Romance term is by far and away the more common in spoken English.

Semantic differentiation has frequently developed which may have neutralised any previous distinction in register: *wedding: marriage, ask: demand*.

In conclusion it should be summed up that the French influence on English language started its course with the Norman Conquest of 1066 AD. William of Normandy defeated England in the Battle of Hastings and the governance of England fell into the hands of the French. The ruling class influenced not just the socio-political aspects of England but also its language. The French influence was found in both vocabulary and grammar of English. The extent of French influence on the vocabulary of English may be studied under different categories.

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