

Anglo Saxon

The grammar and key vocabulary of English comes from Anglo Saxon making English essentially a Germanic language. Around 30% of the words we use in English are Anglo Saxon in origin and they tend to be the most commonly used – over 70% according to most estimates. The top ten most commonly used verbs, for example, are all survivors from old English.

What makes the English language unusual is that its lexicon (vocabulary) borrows heavily from other languages – particularly Latin, Greek and French

Latin

Perhaps surprisingly the Roman occupation of Britain had little initial impact on the development of the English language. Only place names like **London**, **Bath** & **Chester** indicate the official language of the occupiers.

It was with the arrival of Christian missionaries in the 6th and 7th centuries that significant numbers of Latin words began entering the lexicon. Latin was the lingua franca or common language of the Christian world, with the *mass* or service being conducted in Latin. Other religious words like

abbot, **altar**, **apostle** & **candle**

gradually came into common use.

French

The invasion of the Normans in 1066 greatly increased the number of 'foreign' words in common use. The

Normans introduced a legal system with its own vocabulary: words like **jury** and **verdict**. In a sense this was a further expansion of the influence of Latin, as what became known as Anglo-Norman had Latin roots. Sometimes the new Anglo-Norman words existed alongside existing Anglo-Saxon ones: *beef* and *cow* for example.

Though the Norman dialect declined, French remained the language of court and learning. It had a prestige which is still present today.

Greek

The frequency of Greek terms in English can again be traced back to the importance of Latin. Medieval scholars learned Greek vocabulary by studying Latin texts.

Words with a Greek origin are particularly common in medicine, science and education. Words with a -phy or -gy suffix typically have Greek roots: **geography**, **demography** and **etymology**, for example

About 5% of commonly English words have a direct Greek origin but around 25% come via Latin.