

**AN IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION OF A LANGUAGE WITH ACCUMULATED  
DEBTS: THE CASE WITH THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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**Abstract**

*English borrowed a wide range of words and expressions from different parts of the world. The borrowings make the language a cosmopolitan one. When speakers imitate a word from a foreign language, they are said to borrow it, and their imitation is called a borrowing or loanword. Languages usually come into contact. When two or more languages meet, a good number of linguistic phenomena such as interference, code-switching, code-mixing and borrowing occur. It is these occurrences that this paper seeks to address. English borrowed a number of words from French, such as names of animals and the meat they produce. During the period of modern English, a greatest number of words were borrowed from Latin. The century or so after 1500 witnessed the influx of many words. English also extended a great deal of their borrowings to German and Africa; most of the English words and expressions have their trace and origin to German and African. The focus of this paper is to show the influence of these borrowed words and expressions on the English language. The paper also established the fact that it is fashionable to use foreign words and expressions while communicating principally in a particular code.*

**Key Words:** Accumulation, Borrowing, Cosmopolitan, Debts and History

**Introduction**

English is one of the most popular world languages. It has had a remarkable history. No one can give empirical record of the particular day or particular time when English came to be spoken by people. This is because the histories of all languages moved away into the droplets of early time. As a cosmopolitan language which opens its doors to welcome every languages from different parts of the world, English could be said to have accumulated so many linguistic debts. One of the major reasons why English has remained the window which opens up the vast prospect of human achievements is because of all the linguistic debts it has accumulated over time. Virtually all the languages of the world have parts to play in the English language. English, over the years, has come into contact with a number of languages, which have exerted on it varying degrees of influence. As a result, English has loanwords and expressions from such languages including French (tête-à-tête, par

excellence), Latin (verbatim, vox populi vox dei), German (yatch, duvet), Italian (opera, diminuendo), Spanish (a carto plazo, a posta), Japanese (judo, tycoon).

It is evident from the findings of this research that English borrows words and expressions from various autochthonous languages of the continent of Africa. Take, for example, voodoo, zombie, banjo, agbada etc. (Eyisi, Okolo and Oboko, 2015: 107- 108). Research has shown that English borrowed about seventy-five percent of its words from various world languages. English speakers continue to borrow words from almost every language spoken upon the earth, even in this present day. All these borrowings are common facts today. They do not attract lofty attentions as they did in the middle Ages and Renaissance. According to Gartand (2002: 53) Canon, about 25 percent of the words in English are from French; 8 percent each from Japanese and Spanish; 7 percent each from Italian and Latin; 6 percent each from Russian and Yiddish; 3 percent from Chinese; and progressively smaller percentages from Arabic, Portuguese, Hindi, Sanskrit, Hebrew, Afrikaans, Malayo-Polynesian, Vietnamese, Amerindian languages, Swedish, Bengali, Danish, Indonesian, Korean, Persian, Amharic, Eskimo-Aleut, Irish, Norwegian, and thirty other languages.

Despite all the cosmopolitanism of the present English vocabulary, English has not changed from its value as the world's leading language. English still remains English in its full vigour, and in its essential respect. To this end, the words of Algeo (2010: 27) on this matter is worth quoting in extenso:

The words that all of us use over and over again and the grammatical structures in which we couch our observations upon practically everything under the sun remain distinctively English. What has been acquired from other languages has not always been particularly worth gaining... The words and expressions borrowed are for aesthetic preferences. But such aesthetic preferences are purely matters of style and have nothing to do with the subtle patterning that make one language different from another... It is true that what we have borrowed has brought greater wealth to our word stock, but the true Englishness of our mother tongue has in no way been lessened by such loans, as those who speak and write it lovingly will always keep in mind.

### **One Language, Many Debts: A Case of the English Language**

In 1066, English borrowed few words from French. Some of these words are capon, castle, jugglers, prison, etc. The Norman Conquest made French the language of the official class in England. As a result, many words that denote government and administration, lay and spiritual came from French. Some of these words include: attorney, chancellor, country, court, crime, state, judge, jury, major, noble, royal etc. In the religious field, some of the borrowed words include: clergy, preach, sacrament, vestment and very many others. Words designating English titles of nobility like: prince, duke, markees, viscount, baron and their feminine equivalents can be traced to the period when England was in the hands of the Norman French ruling class. Some words associated with the military like army, captain, lieutenant, sergeant and soldier all originated from French. Brigade and its derivative

brigadier came into the English vocabulary in the seventeenth century. On a similar note, Canon (2001:34) makes the following observations:

Some names of animals and the meat they produce have French origin. Examples are *beef, mutton, pork* and *real*. Other words borrowed from French in the Middle English Period include: *dignity, enamor, feign, fool, fruit, horrible, letter, literature, magic, male, marvel, mirror, oppose, question, regard, remember, sacrifice, safe, salary, search, second, secret, seize, sentence, single, sober, solace* etc.

In addition to Canon's claim, Algeo (2010: 36) points out that French words have come into English from two dialects of French: the Norman spoken in England (Anglo – Norman) and the Central French (that of Paris, later standard French). More recent borrowings from French do not naturalize than older ones. These later borrowed words omit the French accents except where they are usual in English. Some of these words are: *aide-de-camp, amateur, ballet, baton, beau, bouillon, boulevard, brochure, brunette, bureau, café, camouflage, chaise longue, champagne, chaperon, chi-chi, chiffonier, chute, cliché, commandant, communiqué, connoisseur, coupe, coupon, crepe, crochet, debris, debut, décor, deluxe, denouement, detour, elite, embonpoint, encore, ensemble, entrée, envoy, etiquette, fiancé (e), flair, fuselage, genre, glacier, grippe, hangar, hors d' oeuvre, impasse, invalid, laissez faire, liaison, limousine, lingerie, massage, matinee, ménage, menu, morale, morgue, naïve, negligee, nuance, passé, penchant, plateau, premiere, protégé, rapport, ration, ravine, repartee, repertoire, reservoir, restaurant, reveille, revue, risqué, roué, rouge, saloon, savant, savoir faire, souvenir, suede, surveillance, svelte, tete-a-tete, vignette and vis-à-vis*. The suffix – *ville* in the names of so many American towns have French origin. Examples of such towns include: the *Briggsvilles, Higginsvilles, Jacksonvilles* etc.

In the observations of Crystal (2000:viii), French is the most important single language for borrowing, but more French loans enter through British than through American English, because of the geographical proximity of the United Kingdom to France.

English extended their borrowings to German. Most of the English words and expressions have their trace and origin to German. As Algeo (2010:66) pointed out, Dutch and other forms of Low German have contributed a number of words to English, to a large extent via the commercial relationships existing between the English and the Dutch and Flemish-speaking peoples from the Middle Ages on. The Dutch influenced English through the following activities:

- **Seafaring Activities:** Through the seafaring activities of the Dutch, a good number of nautical terms made headway into the English lexicon. Some of such terms include: *boom, bowline, bowsprit, buoy, commodore, cruise, deck, dock, freight, rover, pirate, scow, skipper, sloop, smuggle, split, taffrail, yacht and yawl*.
- **Cloth Making:** one of the major occupations of the Dutch was cloth making. Through this activity, the following words were formed: *combrick, duck, duffel, nap, Pea jacket, spool*, etc. All those clothes and

materials were made and the merchants carried them to England. These commercial activities going on between the Dutch and the English gave room for the intrusion of the Dutch expressions into English.

- **Cooking and Other Culinary Activities:** The Dutch were known as people who eat and drink well, wherever they go. As a result of these, some words like *booze, brandy, gin, hop, limburger, log and pickle, noodle* were formed.
- **Painting and Decoration:** Dutch were as well, known as people who valued aesthetics. They were well known for painting, especially. With these the following words were formed: *easel, etch, landscape, maulstick and sketch.*

Some other words that have the Germanic origin, especially from High German, are terms that relate with geology and mineralogy. Such words include: *cobalt, feldspar, gneiss, loess, meerschaum, nickel, quartz, seltzer and zinc.*

From yet another popular world language called Italian, English has acquired a good number of words, including much of our musical terminology. Algeo (2010:67) shows that some musical terms as: alto, duet, fugue, madrigal, presto, viola da gamba, and violin appear in English as early as sixteenth century. From seventeenth century, words like *adagio, allegro, largo, maestro, opera, piano, recitative, solo, sonata, and tempo* came into the English language. In eighteenth century, interest in Italian music reached the zenith in England with *andante, aria, cadenza, cantata, concerto, contralto, crescendo, diminuendo, oratorio, prima donna, rondo, soprano, staccato, trio, trombone, viola, and violoncello.* Words like *diva, piccolo, pizzicato, and vibrato* came into English in nineteenth century.

Other English words of Italian origin include *artichoke, balcony, balloon, bandit, bravo, broccoli, canto, carnival, cartoon, casino, cupola, dilettante, firm, fresco, ghetto, gondola, grotto, incognito, inferno, influenza, lagoon, lava, malaria, maraschino, miniature, motto, pergola, piazza, portico, regatta, replica, scope, stanza, stiletto, studio, torso, umbrella, vendetta, and volcano.* Some words like *corridor, gazette and porcelain* are of ultimate Italian origin, which came by way of French.

Furthermore, English's linguistic debt extended to Spanish. Spanish (Español) is a Romance language that originated in Castile, a region of Spain. Approximately 406 million people speak Spanish as a native language, making it second only to Mandarin in terms of its number of native speakers worldwide. It also has 60 million speakers as a second language, and 20 million students as a foreign language. Spanish is one of the six official languages of the United Nations and is used as an official language by the European Union and Mercosur.

Spanish is a part of the Ibero-Romance group of languages, which evolved from several dialects of common Latin in Iberia after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century. It was first documented in central-northern Iberia in the nineteenth century and gradually spread with the expansion of the Kingdom Castile into central and southern Iberia.

English has taken words from this language through travel, trade, exploration, and colonization. A good number of Spanish words entered into English between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Some of these words loaned include adobe, anchory, Armanda, armadillo, avocado, barbecue, barracuda, bolero, calaboose, cannibal, cargo, cask, castanet, chili, cigar, cockroach, cocoa, cordovan, corral, desperado, domino, embargo, flotilla, frijoles, galleon, guitar, hacienda, junta, key, lasso, maize, mantilla, mesa, mescal, mesquite, mosquito, mullet, negro, palmetto, patio, peccadillo, plaza, poncho, potato, punctilio, sherry, sierra, siesta, silo, sombrero, stevedore, tamale, tomato, tornado, tortilla, and vanilla.

In nineteenth century, a number of words were adopted from Spanish, especially by Americans. Such words include: bonanza, buckaroo, canyon, chaparral, cinch, lariat, mustang, pinto, pueblo, ranch, rodeo, stampede, tango, and vamoose.

Twentieth century borrowings were mainly culinary terms. Some of these words include: frijoles and refritos (refried beans), margarita and sangria.

In addition to all these borrowings, many words of African origin entered into the English lexicon by way of Portuguese and Spanish contacts with the Africans, through the Spanish and Portuguese merchants. From the west coast of Africa, for instance, words like *banana* and *yam*, appeared into English toward the end of the sixteenth century. It is likely that *yam* entered the vocabulary of American English independently.

On this note, Cheshire (1991:43) (ed) observes that in the South, where it is used more frequently than elsewhere, it designates not just any kind of sweet potato, as in other parts, but a red sweet potato, which is precisely the meaning it has in the Gullah form *yambi*. Hence it is likely that this word was introduced into Southern American English direct from Africa, despite its Portuguese transmission in earlier English.

Some other words like *voodoo*, with its variants *hoodoo* is of African origin and was introduced by way of Louisiana French. *Gorilla* is also an African word which first appeared in the *Boston Journal of Natural History* in 1847. Other words like *juke* and *jazz* are of African origin. More examples of the words with African origin include *banjo*, *buckra*, *cooter*, *Timbaktu*, and *Zombi*. *Samba* and *rumba* appeared in English by way of Brazilian Portuguese and Cuban Spanish, respectively.

Finally, in all these borrowing which English has engaged in, Japanese was not left out. The increase in the importance of Japanese as a source for loans is doubtless a consequence of the increased commercial importance of Japan. Most of the words borrowed from Japan express concepts inherent to Japanese culture, while some are words of Chinese origin that were first exposed to English through Japan. They are exemplified in the table below:

<b>Word</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Akita	a large breed of Japanese dog
aikido	a Japanese system of fighting
arame	a type of edible seaweed
adzuki	a type of bean grown in eastern Asia and china
bokeh	aesthetic quality of out-of-focus areas of an image
bonsai	tray gardening
bunraku	a form of traditional Japanese puppet theatre
Bento	a single-portion takeout meal, box lunch
bonze	a Buddhist monk
bukkake	a sex act portrayed in pornographic films
daikon	a kind of white radish
Dashi	a simple soup stock fundamental in Japanese
edamame	soybeans boiled whole in the green pod
Fugu	the meat of the toxic puffer fish
Futon	a flat mattress with a fabric stuffed with cotton
geisha	traditional Japanese artist-entertainers
Genro	retired elder Japanese statesman
gyoza	Chinese dumplings
ginkgo	a gymnosperms tree grown as ornamental
Geta	a pair of Japanese raised clogs
haiku	a very short poem consisting of three lines
hibachi	a small, portable charcoal grill
hijiki	a type of edible seaweed commonly found or coast lines
hentai	pornographic anime
hikki komori	a psychological condition of isolated lifestyle
honcho	head, chief
ikebana	flower arrangement
imari	Japanese porcelain wares
Inro	a case for holding small objects
Judo	refers to the Olympic sports
jujutsu	a Japanese system of fighting
kabuki	a traditional form of Japanese theatre
kakemono	a vertical scroll of ink-and-brush painting
kakiemon	Japanese porcelain wares featuring enamel decoration
karaoke	empty orchestra
kirigami	similar to origami, but involves cutting in addition to folding
Koto	a traditional stringed musical instrument

## **Conclusion**

This paper has examined different words that came into the English language through a process called borrowing or loan. English ranks first as an international language. It is a

language of trade/commerce. It is used for political, economic and diplomatic relations in the international community. As a language of wider communication, it is used to promote cordial relationship and healthy communication in the global village. Based on this fact, borrowing of words become unavoidable in the language. For instance, French is the most important single language for borrowing, but more French loans enter through British than through American English, because of the geographical proximity of the United Kingdom to France.

In the case of Latin, long before English began its separate existence when English speakers had migrated to the British Isles, those who spoke it as a regional type of continental Germanic had acquired some Latin words. This is similar to that of Spanish, Italian, African etc. English has taken words from these languages through travel, trade, exploration, and colonization. In all these borrowings, one thing remains very clear. English has not changed from its value as the world's leading language. English still remains English in its full vigour and in its essential respect.

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