

Lexical Change

Seminar 'Lexicology'

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Outline

- **Warm-up:** Language evolution in our lifetime
- **History:** The history of the English vocabulary
- **Present-Day lexicon:** Borrowing and diversity
- **Types of lexical change:** An overview
- **Innovation & attrition:** A closer look
- **Practice:** Studying lexical attrition with the OED
- **Summary:** Key takeaways

Warm-up: Language evolution in our lifetime

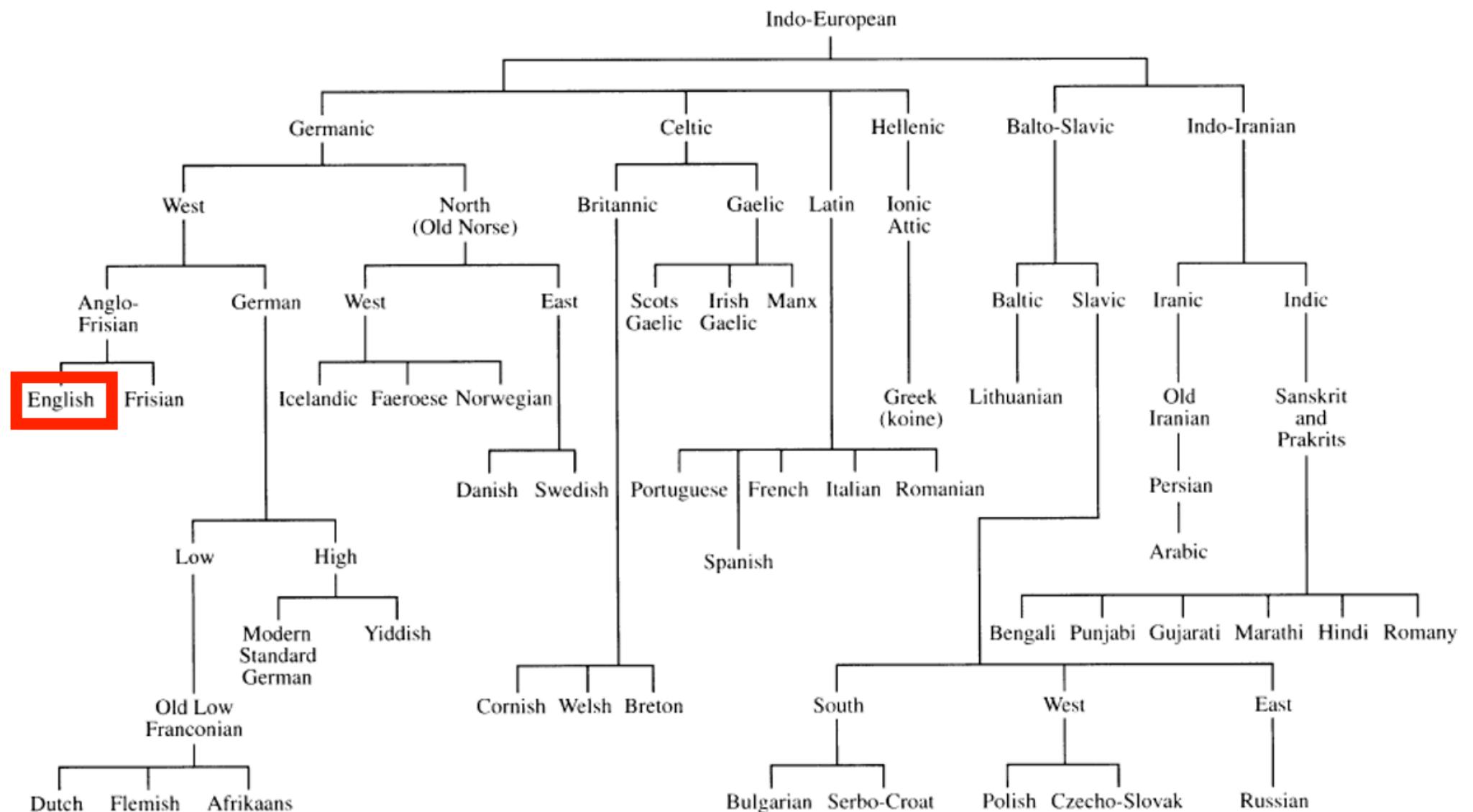
In pairs (3 mins):

1. Think of **three words** that have emerged or changed meaning during your lifetime
2. Consider **technological, social, or cultural changes** that influenced these words
3. Are these **formal** or **semantic** neologisms?

Examples to consider: *smartphone, to google, influencer, Covid, viral, streaming*

The history of the English vocabulary

The Indo-European language family



English as part of the Indo-European family tree

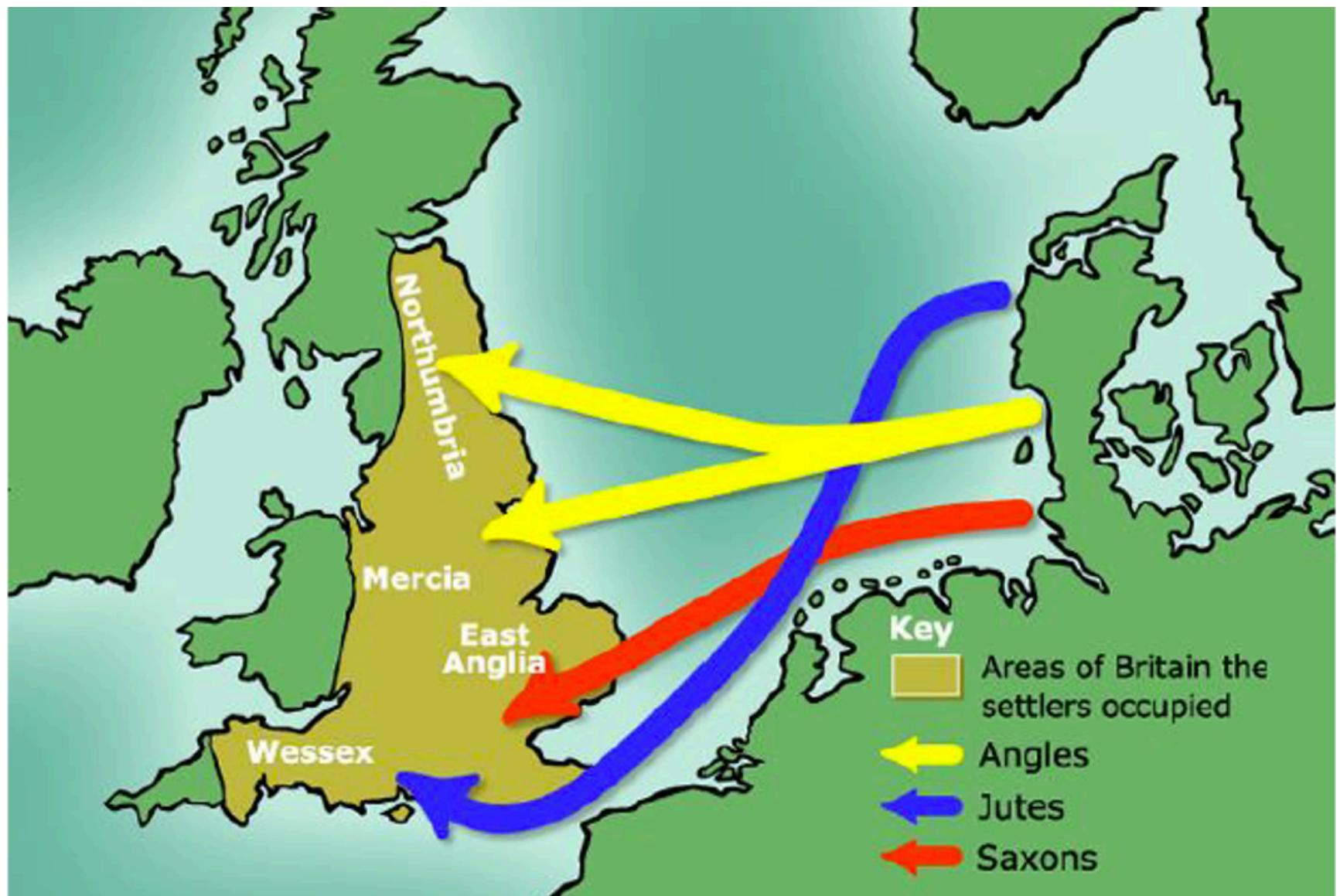
Periods of English

Old English (ca. 450–1100)

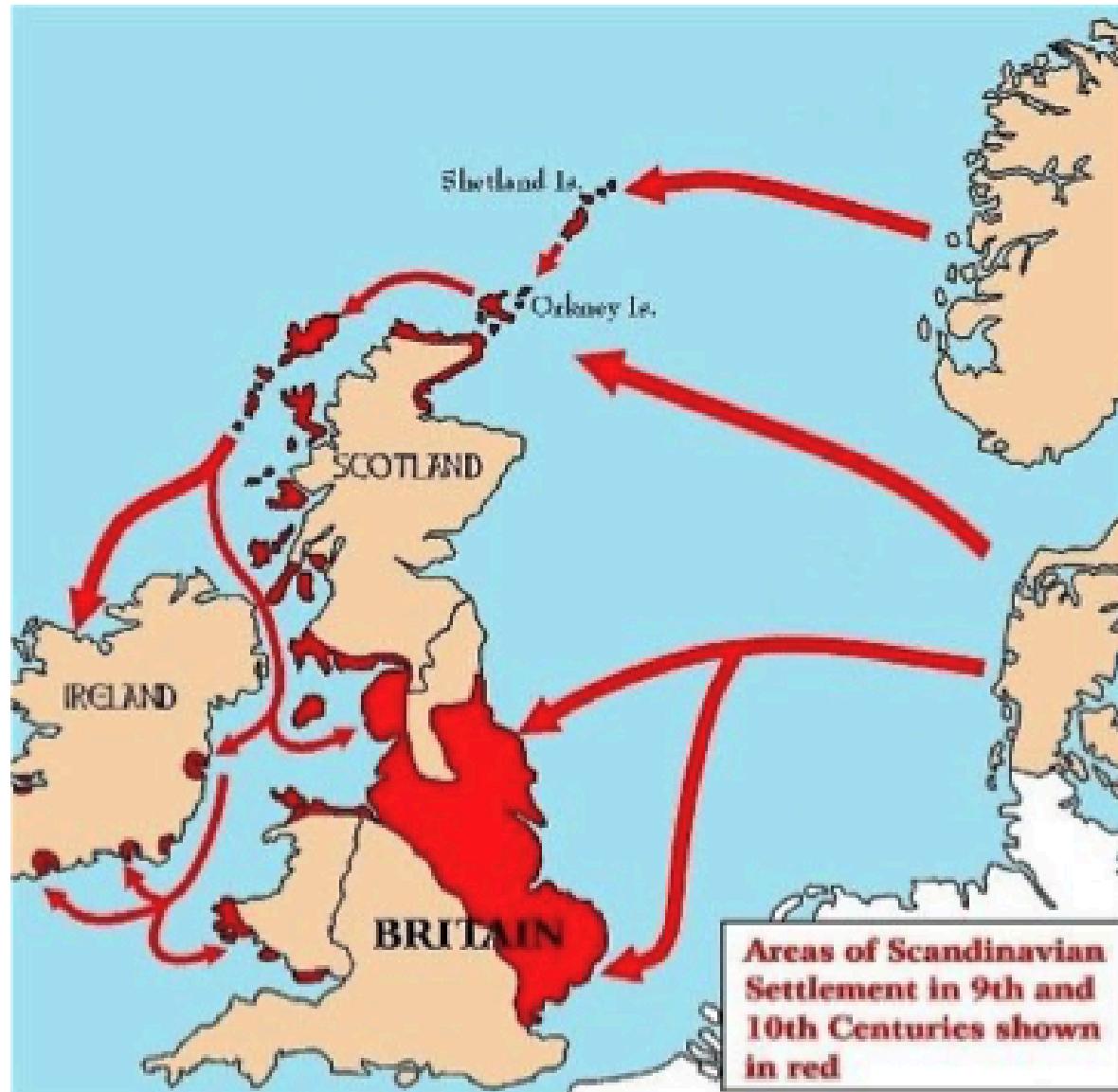
External history

- **410** (traditional date according to Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*: 449): Angles, Saxons and Jutes (and some Frisians), speaking varieties of West Germanic languages, conquer the main British Isle → **Germanic Conquest**
- **c. 700**: earliest written documents in Old English
- **from 6th century**: Christianization
 - Irish missionaries (c. 563 St. Columba to Iona)
 - missionaries from Rome (c. 597; St. Augustine to Canterbury)
- **from 8th century onwards**: Viking raids and Danish settlement
 - 793: sacking of Monastery of Lindisfarne
- **878**: establishment of the 'Danelaw'

Germanic conquest and Viking raids



Germanic tribes settling in Britain



Viking raids and the Danelaw

Linguistic characteristics

- **Word order:** Relatively free.
- **Vocabulary:** Germanic with some Latin (e.g., *wine*, *cheese*, *street*) and Scandinavian (e.g. *take*, *die*, *sky*) loanwords.
- **Morphology:** An inflecting/synthetic language; nouns and adjectives inflect for 4 cases, 2 numbers, and 3 grammatical genders.

Middle English (ca. 1100–1500)

External history

- **1066**: Norman Conquest (William the Conqueror; Battle of Hastings)
- for more than three centuries, England was trilingual ('Triglossia'): (Anglo-)French and Latin as 'high variety' and English as 'low variety'
- **from mid-14th century**: English slowly reestablished in various domains (1349 English as language of education, 1362 opening of Parliament, literary language) → English re-introduced as high variety

High varieties

1. **Latin**: church, learning, documents
2. **French**: upper classes, feudal aristocracy

Low variety

3. **English**: peasants, lower clergy, most people in cities

Middle English linguistic characteristics

- **synthetic → analytic shift**: breakdown of inflection due to weakening of final syllables ('Entsilbenabschwächung': /a/, /u/, /o/ > /ə/ > Ø)
- **loss of grammatical gender** (c. 1200): article *the* adopts natural gender
- **increasingly fixed word order** (less flexibility)
- **dialect age**: no generally accepted standard
- **mass borrowing**: war/military, administration/law, religion/church, fashion, social life → mixed Germanic/Romance vocabulary
- huge number of **borrowings** in the field of war/military, administration/law, religion/church, fashion, social life etc. (+ influence on word formation and stress patterns) → end of Middle English: mixed Germanic/Romance vocabulary

Early Modern English (ca. 1500–1800)

External history

- **1476**: William Caxton introduces printing press to England
- **1492**: discovery of America
- **Renaissance and Humanism**: rediscovery of classical authors and literature (e.g. translations of classical literature)
- **1534**: Reformation
- **1611**: King James Bible (first official English translation of the Bible for the English church)
- growing literacy → literacy spread down the social ranks, and from the male to the female sex (→ new reading public → translations needed)

Key linguistic developments

- **Great Vowel Shift** (c. 1400/1500): Raising and diphthongisation of long vowels, increasing the discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation.
- **Inflectional system**: The weakening and loss of inflections continues.
- **Word order**: Becomes more fixed (SVO).
- **Standardisation**: Development of the London dialect into a new standard.
- **Orthography**: Emergence of a standardised spelling system.
- **Learned vocabulary**: Influx of loanwords from Latin and Greek ('hard words').

Late Modern English (ca. 1800–1945)

External history

- **from 1700s:** British Imperialism → expansion of English all over the world (Australia, India etc.)
- **1700s/1800s:** normativism and prescriptivism (1755: Samuel Johnson *A Dictionary of the English Language* → first comprehensive dictionary of the English language)
- **1900s:** scientific and industrial revolutions → development of technical registers

Linguistic characteristics

- **do-periphrasis**: Becomes obligatory in interrogatives and sentential negation (from 1700).
- **Grammaticalisation**: Beginning of the progressive aspect and present perfect (from 1800).
- **Pronunciation**: Standard British English (RP) becomes non-rhotic.
- **American English**: An emergent standard develops.
- **Global borrowing**: Vocabulary expands with words from languages around the world, leading to **vocabulary expansion and global influence**.

Present-Day English (since ca. 1945)

External history

- **New media:** The rise of telephone, TV, internet etc. accelerates change.
- **American English:** Increasing importance and influence after WWI and WWII.
- **Global English:** Established as a world language and a lingua franca.
- **Postcolonial Englishes:** Increasing importance (e.g., Indian English), contributing to a truly **global English** shaped by **technological change**.

Present-Day English lexicon

A unique mixture

"Der heutige englische Wortschatz ist eine einzigartige Mischung von germanischen und romanischen Elementen; in Bezug auf das Vokabular stellt also das Englische einen Sonderfall unter den europäischen Sprachen dar." (Leisi 2008: 41)

Most frequent words in English

Analysis based on COCA:

Frequency			
rank	word/lemma	PoS	frequency
1	the	a	22038615
2	be	v	12545825
3	and	c	10741073
4	of	i	10343885
5	a	a	10144200
6	in	i	6996437
7	to	t	6332195
8	have	v	4303955
9	to	i	3856916
10	it	p	3872477

Top frequent words showing mixed origins

Languages of origin in high-frequency words

Scandinavian (Old Norse):

- *they, their, to get, to take, to give, like, to want*

French:

- *people, very*

French/Latin:

- *just, to use*

Germanic core vocabulary

Elements surviving from Old English form the basic vocabulary:

- **Pronouns, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs**
- **Fundamental concepts:**
 - OE *mann* → *man*
 - OE *wif* → *wife*
 - OE *cild* → *child*
 - OE *hūs* → *house*
 - OE *drincan* → *drink*
 - OE *libban* → *live*

Latin influence

Continental borrowings

- *street, wine, kitchen, mile, butter, cheese*

After settlement (post-450)

- *port, mount, -chester*

Christianisation

- *martyr, clerk, creed, nun, verse*

Renaissance and later

- *humanist, abdomen, skeleton*

Old Norse influence

Viking raids and the Danelaw

- Genetic resemblance between Old Norse and Old English
- Strong influence on **basic vocabulary**

Examples

- **Function words:** *they, them, their, though*
- **Verbs:** *to call, to die, to take, to raise*
- **Nouns:** *law, husband, egg, birth*
- **Adjectives:** *awkward, ill, weak*

Consequence: English drifts apart from West Germanic languages

French superstrate influence

Superstrate: socially/politically superior language influences inferior position

- **Government/Administration:** authority, chancellor, council, court, crown, duke, empire, government, liberty, minister, noble, palace, parliament, prince, reign, royal, sovereign, treaty
- **Law:** accuse, advocate, assault, attorney, blame, crime, evidence, fraud, jail, judge, justice, pardon, plaintiff, prison, punishment, verdict
- **Religion/Church:** abbey, baptism, cathedral, charity, clergy, confess, divine, faith, immortality, mercy, religion, saint, sermon, temptation, virgin, virtue
- **Military/Warfare:** ambush, army, battle, captain, combat, defend, enemy, guard, navy, peace, soldier, spy
- **Food:** appetite, bacon, beef, cream, dinner, feast, fruit, herb, lemon, lettuce, mustard, mutton, olive, pork, salad, salmon, spice, veal
- **Fashion:** diamond, dress, fashion, fur, garment, gown, jewel, lace, robe, satin, wardrobe

Loans from other languages

- **Portuguese/Spanish:** *marmalade, banana, cannibal, creole, mosquito, mulatto, tobacco*
- **Italian:** *alarm, million, balcony, opera, piazza, sonnet, stanza*
- **Greek:** *bible, character, climate, fantasy, horizon, tragedy*
- **Arabian:** *admiral, elixir, hazard, mosque, alcohol, alchemy*
- **Persian:** *azure, chess*

Global loan words

Table 3.1 Loan words from around the world

<i>Word</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Reaches English through</i>	<i>Date and comments</i>
algebra	Arabic	Latin	1551 (in the mathematical sense)
assassin	Arabic	French	1531 (in the sense 'murderer')
budgerigar	Yuwaalaraay		1847
bungalow	Hindustani		1676
caddy	Malay		1792
caravan	Persian	French	1596
commandeer	South African Dutch		1881
curry	Tamil		1598
haiku	Japanese		1899
igloo	Inuit		1856
kangaroo	Guugu Yimidhirr		1770
kiosk	Turkish or Persian	French	1625
kumquat	Cantonese		1699
marijuana	Nahuatl	Spanish	1874
moose	Eastern Abenaki		1614
potlatch	Nootka	Chinook Jargon	1844
pyjamas	Persian	Urdu	1801
raccoon	Algonquian		1608
safari	Swahili		1859
tank	Gujerati	Portuguese	1634
tea	Amoy Chinese	Malay, Dutch	1660
thug	Hindi		1810
toboggan	Micmac	French	1829
tulip	Turkish		1578
tycoon	Japanese		1857

Recent European loans and dialectal terms

Table 3.2 Some recent – and predominantly European – loan words

<i>Word</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Date</i>
Blitzkrieg	German	1939
bustier	French	1978
fado	Portuguese	1902
geisha	Japanese	1891
Gestalt	German	1992
glasnost	Russian	1981
hygge	Danish	1960
lingerie	French	1835
nacho	Spanish	1948
nosh	Yiddish	1873
ombudsman	Swedish	1872
rodeo	Spanish	1811
spaghetti	Italian	1845
tsunami	Japanese	1897

Recent borrowings from European languages

Table 3.3 Some dialectal terms in standard English

<i>Word</i>	<i>Dialectal source</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Date</i>
blackmail	Scottish		1530
craic	Irish or Ulster Scots		1972
emmet	Cornish	'tourist'	1975
flummox	Western England		1837
grockle	South-west England	'tourist'	1964
guffaw	Scots		1721
kerfuffle	Scots	'dispute, disorder'	1946
moke	Hampshire, Devon	'donkey'	1839
Scouse	Liverpool	'Liverpudlian'	1960
up the duff	Australian	'pregnant'	1941

Dialectal words entering standard English

Types of lexical change

Consequences of borrowing

Consociation vs Dissociation

Consociation: German

- Mund – *mündlich*
- Heiliger – *heilig*
- Fuß – *Fußgänger*
- Wort – *wörtlich*
- Buch – *Buchstabe* – *Bücherei*

Dissociation: English

- mouth – *oral*
- saint – *holy*
- foot – *pedestrian*
- word – *verbal*
- book – *letter* – *library*

Partial synonymy

Register differences

- *to ask* (c. 885) – neutral
- *to question* (c. 1470) – formal
- *to interrogate* (c. 1483) – official/legal

Connotational differences

- **solitude** vs *loneliness*
- **freedom** vs *liberty*

Result: Greater linguistic choice through partial synonyms

“Hard words”

Often etymologically unrelated → difficult to learn:

Examples of confusion (malapropisms)

- *illiterate* vs *illegitimate*
- *missile* vs *missive*
- *epitaph* vs *epithet*

Change in usage frequency

Lexical innovation

The interplay of cultural and linguistic innovation

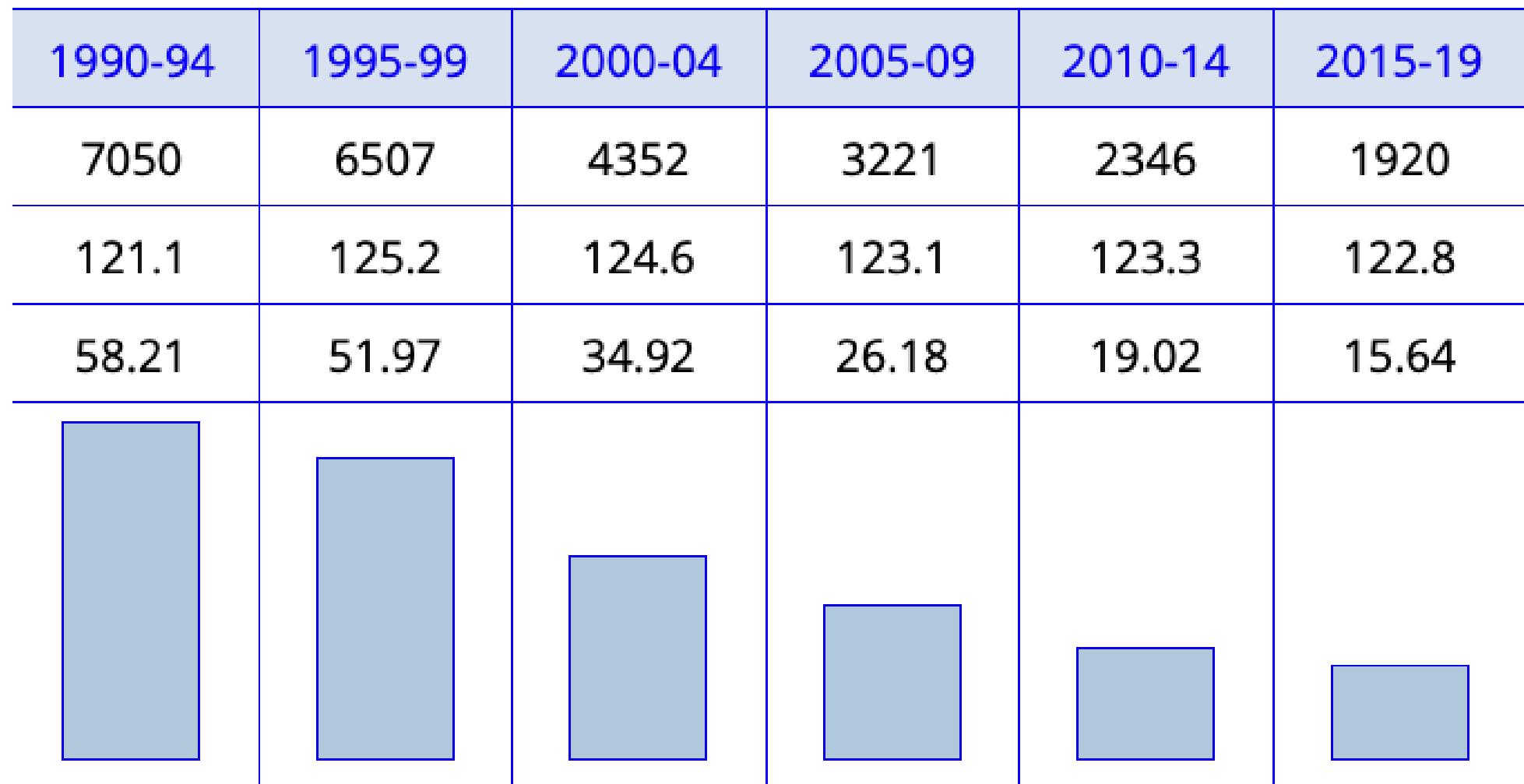
- Society changes → new practices and products emerge
- Language changes first on the **lexical level** through **neologisms**

Examples:

- **Formal neologisms:** smartphone, iPhone, Covid
- **Semantic neologisms:** hotspot, Querdenker, social distancing, spreader

Lexical attrition

Word loss through decreased frequency:



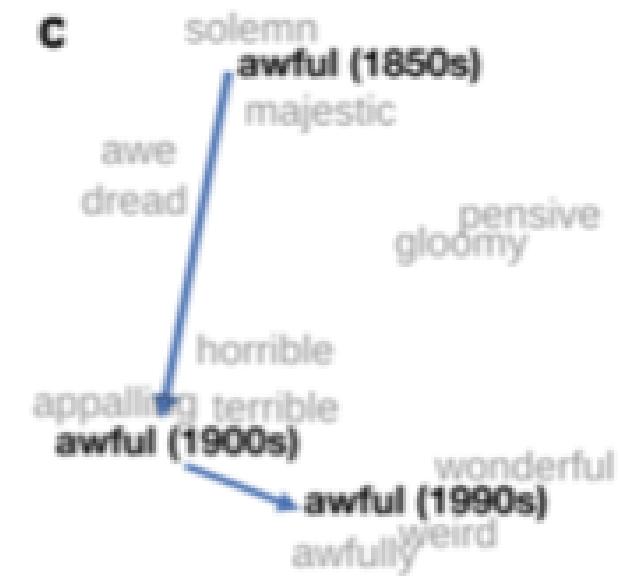
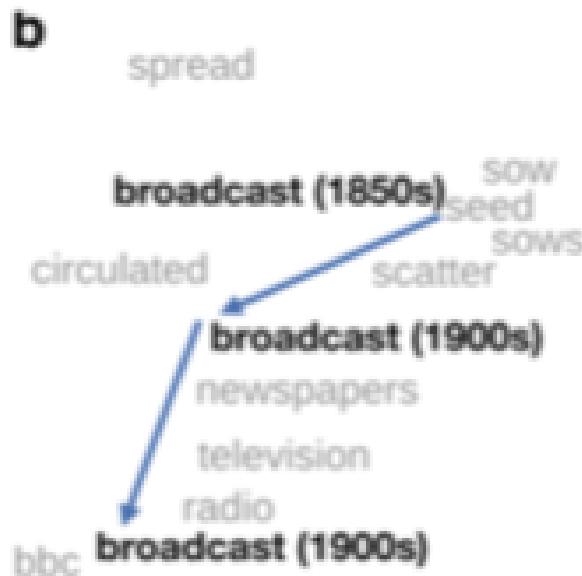
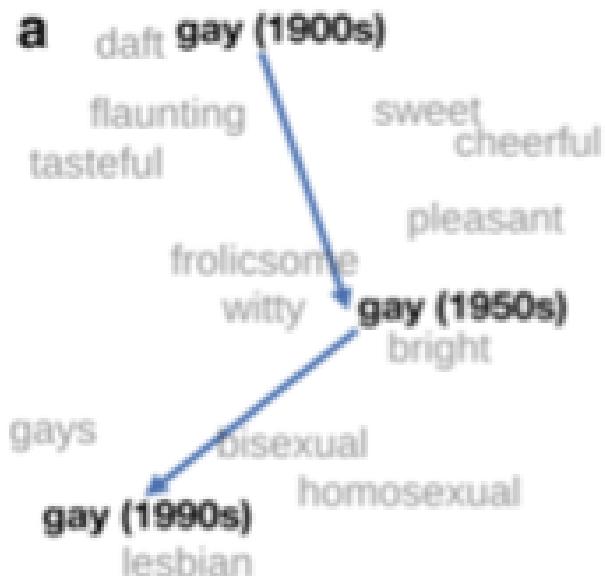
Frequency decline of *telephone* in COCA

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
	0	0	51	59	34	15
	29.1	28.8	29.9	33.1	34.8	35.5
	0.00	0.00	1.71	1.78	0.98	0.42

Frequency decline of *Walkman* in COHA

Meaning change

Semantic change over time:



Types and directions of meaning change

Common patterns: narrowing, broadening, amelioration, pejoration

Practice: studying lexical attrition

Objective

Study what types of words become obsolete using OED data and Excel analysis

Your task

1. **Collect obsolete words** from the OED Advanced Search
2. **Export data** as CSV
3. **Analyse patterns** using Excel Pivot Tables

Step 1: OED Advanced Search

USAGE	DEFINITION
<input type="checkbox"/> colloquial and slang (692)	Under control or authority; at one's disposal.
<input type="checkbox"/> historical (344)	
<input type="checkbox"/> poetic and literary (338)	
<input type="checkbox"/> archaic (292)	
<input type="checkbox"/> humorous (224)	
<input type="checkbox"/> derogatory (204)	
<input type="checkbox"/> depreciative (153)	
<input type="checkbox"/> allusive (23)	
<input type="checkbox"/> offensive (22)	
<input type="checkbox"/> euphemistic (14)	
<input type="checkbox"/> irregular (9)	
<input type="checkbox"/> ironic (6)	
<input type="checkbox"/> disused (1)	
OBSOLESCENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> In current use (438,723)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Obsolete (80,436)	

?1561-1833
abandonate, v.
transitive. = abandon, v. (in various senses). Also 1

1487-88
abandonly, adv.¹
Recklessly, impetuously, unguardedly.

1729
abandum, n.
Anything which is sequestered, proscribed, or ab

1721
abannation, n.
= abannition, n.

1583-1835
abannition, n.
An act or the action of banishing someone, usual manslaughter.

Using OED Advanced Search for obsolete words

- Search for obsolete words
- Apply relevant filters
- Select representative sample

Step 2: Export data

OED | Oxford English Dictionary Dictionary ▾ Advanced search Signed in as Ludwig-Maximilia...

Entries (80,436) Meanings (170,780) Quotations (0) Historical Thesaurus (162,848)

SEARCH TERMS

Headword Quotation text
 Definition Quotation author
 Etymology Quotation work
 Forms

Add term Update

DATE OF USE Use First use

From Year (YYYY)
To Year (YYYY)

Update

1 to 50 of 80,436 results Save search 1 2 Next >>

Sort by Frequency

c1400-1540
front, v.¹
transitive. To strike or kick (a person); (with aback) to drive (a person) violently back.

1805-18
cass, n.
Only in great cass, little cass, as names for particular cards in the game of casino: see great casino, little casino at casino, n. 3.

a1400-1532
skift, n.¹
A movement to do something, a beginning.

?c1335-1823
a, conj.
= and, coni 1 A T

Export results (.csv)

Exporting search results as CSV

Save your results for analysis in Excel

Step 3: Excel analysis

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	LEMMA	PART OF SPEECH	DATE OF USE	FREQUENCY BAND NUMBER	DEFINITION	TYPE OF FORMATION	LANGUAGE OF ORIGIN	USAGE	OBSOLESCENCE	REGIONAL ENGLISH	SUBJECT	DOI	OED URL
2	aback	noun	1592-1633	da	A square sectio borrowing	Indo-European/Italic/Latin	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
3	front	verb	c1400-1540		5 transitive. To st borrowing	Indo-European/Italic/Romance/Italo-W	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
4	cass	noun	1805-18		3 Only in great ca shortening	English	Not in use			sport and leis			https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
5	shift	noun	a1400-1532		2 A movement to borrowing	Indo-European/Germanic/North Germanic	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
6	a	conjunction	?c1335-1823		0 #NAME? variant	English	Not in use			Britain and Ireland/British English/En			https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
7	aa	noun	1430-34		0 A stream, a wai borrowing	Indo-European/Germanic/North Germanic	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
8	ab	noun		1587	0 Moisture within unknown		Not in use			sciences/life			https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
9	abackstays	adverb	a1625-94		0 In line with the compound	English	Not in use			transport/na			https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
10	abackwards	adverb	a1477		0 #NAME? derivative	English	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
11	abada	noun	1588-1870		0 Originally in Sol borrowing	Indo-European/Italic/Romance/Italo-W	Not in use			sciences/life			https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
12	abeille	verb	Old English-1275		0 transitive. To ai inherited	Indo-European/Germanic/West Germanic	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
13	abail	verb	1450-58		0 transitive. To pi derivative	English	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
14	abail	verb		1513	0 transitive. To rr borrowing	Indo-European/Italic/Romance/Italo-W	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
15	abait	verb	a1400-1500		0 transitive. To ei derivative	English	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
16	aban	verb	Old English-1565		0 transitive. To si derivative	English	Not in use			religion and i			https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
17	abandon	noun	a1425-1530		0 Chiefly Scottish. borrowing	Indo-European/Italic/Romance/Italo-W	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
18	abandon	adverb	a1250-1500		0 Under control c borrowing	Indo-European/Italic/Romance/Italo-W	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
19	abandonate	verb	?1561-1833		0 transitive. = ab derivative	English	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
20	abandonly	adverb	1487-88		0 Recklessly, imp derivative	English	Not in use			Britain and Ireland/British English/Sc			https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
21	abendum	noun		1729	0 Anything which borrowing	Indo-European/Italic/Latin	Not in use			law			https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
22	abannation	noun		1721	0 #NAME? borrowing	Indo-European/Italic/Latin	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
23	abannition	noun	1583-1835		0 An act or the a borrowing	Indo-European/Italic/Latin	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
24	abar	verb	a1504-1825		0 transitive. To bi derivative	English	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
25	abarcy	noun	1730-1847		0 Insatiableness. borrowing	Indo-European/Italic/Latin, Indo-European/	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
26	abare	verb	Old English-1755		0 transitive. To la inherited	Indo-European/Germanic/West Germanic	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
27	abastic	adjective	1623-1717		0 Insatiable. unknown		Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
28	abarticulatio	noun	1721-28		0 #NAME? borrowing	Indo-European/Italic/Latin	Not in use			sciences/med			https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
29	abase	adverb	a1450-1542		0 Down, low; bac borrowing	Indo-European/Italic/Romance/Italo-W	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
30	abashance	noun	a1450		0 The quality or c derivative	English	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com
31	abastard	verb	1573-1651		0 transitive. To cx borrowing	Indo-European/Italic/Romance/Italo-W	Not in use						https://doi.o http://www.oed.com

Creating a table in Excel

Use Pivot Tables to analyse:

- Word-formation processes
- Language of origin
- Subject areas

Model sheet: https://1drv.ms/x/s!AvkgNVI9yS6aohjiV_csX3J22GCB

Summary

1. **English vocabulary is uniquely mixed:** Germanic core + extensive borrowing
2. **Historical periods** shaped vocabulary through different contact situations
3. **Multiple layers** create rich but complex lexical system
4. **Lexical change** involves innovation, attrition, and meaning change
5. **Empirical analysis** reveals patterns in vocabulary change over time