

ISSN : 0975-9999

SELP JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

VOLUME - II

October - December 2011

Issue 8

Date of Issue : 30th November 2011

Single Issue : Rs. 125



Selp journal of social science indexed with RePEc, Thomson Reuters,
CSA Databases & Collections, Open J-Gate



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SELP JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

(A Refereed Quarterly Journal)

ISSN : 0975 - 9999

Vol : II

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CONTENTS

S.No	Title	Page No.
	Exclusion or inclusion of Karnataka tribes?: facts from human development report	01-03
	Devajana C Nanjunda and Dinesha P T	
	Impact of Tourism on Indian Economy	04-06
	M.V.Sonje	
	Growth of Manufacturing Industries in India	07-09
	M.Manonmani	
	Perception of the Investors towards Fund Selection Criterion in Puducherry: An Empirical Study	10-12
	D.Kandavel, & J.Sundararaj	
	Role of Co-Operative Sector In Women Empowerment	13-16
	Asha Patil	
	Attitude of the Cardamom Labourers towards the Factors of Their Migration	17-19
	K. Arulselvam & ,M.Meena	
	Marketing Mix Strategies towards Rural India	20-23
	K.Madane	
	Role of Non-Governmental Organizations In Rural Development	24-27
	A.Karuppiah, & ,M.Suganya Aravazhi	
	Empowerment of Rural Women Self help Groups in Northern Tamilnadu	28-31
	P.Palanivel., ,Mr.S.Sivakumar & D.Sureshkumar	
	Challenges of higher education students at Cuddalore - a case study	32-35
	K. Murugadoss & M. Ezhumalai	
	Problems Faced By Rural Women Entrepreneurs In Tuticorin District-A Study	36-38
	D.Amutha	
	Prospects of Readymade Garment Entrepreneurs In Erode And Tirupur Town	39-40
	P.Mohanraj & P.Komarasamy	
	Acuity of Customers towards Foreign Retailer's Products	41-42
	R. Bhavani	
	Collision of Globalization on Dairy Industry In India -An Overview	43-45
	R.Rathidevi	
	Impact of Migration on Income and Expenditure of the Households in Thoothukudi District	46-49
	C.Sivamurugan &R. Nalini Bai	
	Corporate Governance	50-54
	M. Dhanusu	
	Problems of the SHG Members in Gulbarga District Of Karnataka	55-59
	Naradgi Rachappa	
	Income, Expenditure, Savings and Investment Pattern of Small and Marginal Farmers in India	60-64
	C. Gunasekaran, & M. Chandrasekaran	
	How French Has Influenced the English Language	65-69
	Jeevaratnam G	
	Centre - State Relations in India: With Special Reference to the Views of the DMK in Tamil Nadu	70-72
	K. Dhiravidamani	
	Production and Marketing of Groundnuts in Namakkal Taluk	73-76
	M.Rajendran & S.Sumathi	
	Woman, Crime and Victims	77-80
	R.Dhakshina murthy,	
	Impact of Mechanisation on Agriculture	81-82
	P. Kumaravel	
	Evolution of Myth in Mankind : A Comparative Study of the Select Plays of Girish Karnad and James Reaney	83-85
	K.Kalavathi	

Vol. II ; Issue

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HOW FRENCH HAS INFLUENCED THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The English language has been shaped by a number of other languages over the centuries. This study reveals the French influence on the English language which has been inevitable as France was England's immediate neighbor, richer in heritage and was a wealthier country. Then the influence expands when William the Conqueror seized England in 1066. At the beginning the Normans used only French to govern England. Subsequently came the lexique of governance, diplomacy, law, war, and travel into the English language. In this study, the impact of the French language on English is researched as well as the degree of French vocabulary influence: Some words are assimilated; some native words are lost while other words' meanings are expanded. Besides, French also influences English grammar, spelling, pronunciation and word-formation. And now we can say the influence is still going on. Major infiltrations can be of the following reasons: The geography, the battles and the wars, the royal influence, and the anti French movement. This paper also brings to light the integration of the two languages to explore the Development and evolution of words and their history and culture.

Key words

Language Influence, Word borrowing, True cognates, faux amis

Introduction

The development of a certain language has a long history. It's inevitable that different languages influence and penetrate each other in their formation and development. In addition, a particular language assimilates the refined portion of other languages to enrich itself. English is the typical representative of this kind of language. As a cosmopolitan language, English has been greatly influenced by various languages, especially by French. On the whole the most direct and observable impact manifests itself on the word borrowing. The scale of vocabulary is wide. We can find words relating to every aspect of human society, viz., government, law, religion, military affairs, and cuisines. In this study, the impact of the French language on English is researched. Also the

degree of French vocabulary influence is highlighted: Some words are assimilated; some native words are lost while other words' meanings are expanded. Besides, French also influences English grammar, spelling, pronunciation and word-formation. And now we can say the influence is still going on. Major infiltrations can be of the following reasons: The geography, the battles and the wars, the royal influence, and the anti French movement. This paper analyzes the integration of the two languages to explore the Development and evolution of words and their history and culture as reflected in color.

The Geography

The French influence has been inevitable as France was England's immediate neighbor, richer in heritage and a wealthier country. Hence Oxford English dictionary reveal that French was the primary source of loans outnumbering Latin, the second largest source.

In the twentieth century however, the links between England and France had become closer in political and economic terms or as regards tourism and communications and the countries had been allies in war. Thus we have witnessed an explosion in the influence of English on French and French on English.

Since the Middle English period French had a strong influence on English. The influence of the French language upon the English language can be divided into two main stages, viz.,

The first stage is from Norman Conquest to 1500. One of the most influential factors is the Norman Conquest. At this stage the French was used by the upper class at first, and then the two languages fused together and at last the French was acknowledged by common people.

The second stage is from 1500 to the present time.

The Anglo-Saxon language was essentially Latinized through French, by adopting French words. The Normans of William the Conqueror were not Norsemen who would have come from Scandinavia; they were people who spoke French as in Normandy. They gave a name to everything, to the facts of everyday life and this influence continued throughout the middle Ages. One can estimate that some 10,000 words were assimilated into the language of the English at the time of its formation from Old English into Middle English (1150-1500). As a result, French was not really a foreign element in England where people started to practice an original Anglo-French language. Thus, from the beginning, the French language acquired, in England, a structural role in the formation of language, which helps to explain why this influence has been continued for nearly a millennium.

The Royale Influence

By the late thirteenth century, seen as being more prestigious than Norman French, the language of the French Royal Court was adopted by English aristocrats and the dignitaries of the Church of England. This French language was widely imposed in areas of cultural life and art. Moreover, the Norman nobility now living in England still obliged their children to learn French directly in France or in special schools.

In his Chronicle, Robert of Gloucester wrote in 1298 -

Which means -

"Vor bote a man conne freyss me telp of him lute.

Ac lowe men holdep to engliss and to hor owe speche Bute."

"Unless you know French, you are hardly considered.

But ordinary people still stick to English and their own language."

The royal influence cannot be underestimated. All the kings of England since Henry II (crowned 1154) to Henry VI (d. 1471) included, that is to say, for over three centuries without interruption, married francophone princesses, Éléonore, Aliénor, Isabelle, Marguerite, Catherine. These princesses brought with them a large retinue. Henry II, the first king of the dynasty of the Plantagenets included in his Kingdom, besides Ireland and Scotland, more than the western half of France because of his marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1152. In short, Henry II ruled a kingdom ranging from Scotland to the Pyrenees. It was arguably the greatest power in Europe. Later on, Philippe Auguste took back land from the sons of Henry II, Richard the Lion Heart and John Lack, including most of the French possessions of the Plantagenets (Normandy, Maine, Anjou, Touraine, Poitou, Aquitaine, Limousin and Bretagne).

It must be said also that some English kings spent more time on the continent than in England. For instance, Henry II spent 21 years on the continent in his 34-year reign. In 1259, Henry III of England formally renounced the possession of Normandy, although he retained some autonomy in the kingdom of France. The loss of Normandy forced the English nobility to choose between England and the Continent, which helped to marginalize the Franco-Norman language to the benefit of French Parisian of one hand, and English on the other hand. The influence of relatives of Eleanor of Provence, wife of Henry III, combined with that of the Lusignan, half-brothers of the King, fuelled the discontent of the English barons hostile to foreign advisers. By an irony of history, the English barons had for their leader, Simon de Montfort a foreigner!

Anti-French Faction

The influence of French was considered by some people as a tragedy for the purity of the language. The proliferation of French loans eventually became the cause of concern and as a result an anti-French faction gradually formed which aimed to check the great influx of words.

Language Sharing

English and French sound very dissimilar when you hear them spoken, but these two languages actually share quite a few commonalities, especially when written.

Words Common to French and English

During the Norman occupation, about 10,000 French words were adopted into English, some three-fourths of which are still in use today. This French vocabulary is found in every domain, from government and law to art and literature. More than a third of all English words are derived directly or indirectly from

French, and it's estimated that English speakers who have never studied French already know 15,000 French words. There are more than 1,700 words that are identical in the two languages - True cognates.

True cognates are spelled (although not pronounced) identically in French and English.

▪ Bu	▪ Lai
rea	sse
u	z-
▪ Ca	fair
fé	e

True cognates

Moreover, the English language has borrowed a great number of French words and expressions. Some of this vocabulary has been so completely absorbed by English that speakers might not realize its origins. Other words and expressions have retained their "Frenchness" - a certain "je ne sais quoi" which speakers tend to be much more aware of (although this awareness does not usually extend to actually pronouncing the word in French). The following is a list of French words and expressions which are commonly used in English.

Adieu – "until God"

Used like "farewell": when you don't expect to see the person again until God (when you die and go to Heaven)

aide-mémoire – "memory aid"

Something that acts as an aid to memory, such as crib notes or mnemonic devices

à la carte – "on the menu"

French restaurants usually offer a menu with choices for each of the several courses at a fixed price. If you want something else (a side orders), you order from the carte. *Note that menu is a false cognate in French and English.

à la mode – “in fashion, style”

In English, this means “with ice cream” - apparently someone decided that having ice cream on pie was the fashionable way to eat it.

avant-garde – “before guard”

Innovative, especially in the arts

bas-relief – “low relief/design”

Sculpture that is only slightly more prominent than its background

bête noire – “black beast”

Similar to a pet peeve: something that is particularly distasteful or difficult and to be avoided.

bon appétit – “good appetite”

The closest English equivalent is “Enjoy your meal.”

bon voyage – “good trip”

English has “Have a good trip,” but Bon voyage is more elegant.

carte blanche – “blank card”

Free hand, ability to do whatever you want/ need

False cognates or faux amis

Though the English and French languages have the same roots there are also a great many Faux Amis, or false cognates, which look similar but have different meanings. This is one of the biggest pitfalls for students of French. There are also “semi-false cognates”: words that can only sometimes be translated by the similar word in the other language.

French influence on English

The influence of the French language upon the English language can be divided into two main stages. The first one is from 1066 to 1500. The decisive factor during this time is the Norman Conquest. A large number of French words poured into English as a part of English etymology, extending influence to grammar, spelling, pronunciation and word-

formation. The second stage is from European Renaissance to the present globalization. With the increasing communication among economy, Culture and technology, many foreign borrowings have been imported from different countries.

The second stage is from the European Renaissance to the present, to accelerate the integration of the world's Information age. English contains many words of French origin, like art, collage, competition, force, machine, police, publicity, role, routine, table, and many other Anglicized French words. These are pronounced according to English rules of orthography, rather than French (which uses nasal vowels not found in English). Around 28% of English vocabulary is of French origin.

This article, however, covers words and phrases that generally entered the lexicon later, as through literature, the arts, diplomacy, and other cultural exchanges not involving conquests. As such, they have not lost their character as Gallicisms, or words that seem unmistakably foreign and “French” to an English-speaking person. A general rule is that if the word or phrase retains French diacritics or is usually printed in italics, it has retained its French identity.

Few of these phrases are common knowledge to all English speakers, and for some English speakers most are rarely if ever used in daily conversation, but for other English speakers many of them are a routine part of both their conversational and their written vocabulary. They may however possibly be used more often in written than in spoken English.

Conclusion

The influence of French on the English language is unbelievably great. Whilst it was

arguable during the Restoration whether these words (loans) were corrupting or enriching the language, today there is no doubt or disputable grounds to argue that the loan did anything but benefit the English language.

No language possesses 100% of its words that are free from any foreign influence. The English language is no exception to the rule and contains many words borrowed from many different languages worldwide.

Today, English is pointed out as the main language on which new words are based (especially in scientific research and Information Technology). This can appear as a great advantage, especially for non-native English speakers who have to deal with the English language at work. Indeed, this makes it easier for them to understand new words because they can guess the English meaning by finding the equivalent which is similar to their own language.

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