

<https://doi.org/10.36719/2663-4619/112/36-39>

Nargiz Aliyeva

“AzerGold” CJSC

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-8450-469X>

nargiz.aliyeva@azergold.az

The Influence of the French Language on English

Abstract

The English language has undergone significant evolution since its inception, influenced by various cultures and languages. One of the most notable contributors to this development is the French language. The English language has been profoundly influenced by the French language, and this influence has played a critical role in shaping the vocabulary, grammar, and spelling of the English language. This relationship dates back to the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, when the Normans, who spoke a dialect of Old French, took control of England. The legacy of this event remains visible in the structure and lexicon of Modern English today. After the Norman Conquest, the English language saw a marked increase of borrowings from French vocabulary and linguistic structures. This article seeks to explore the historical and linguistic significance of the French influence on English, highlighting key examples and the extent of this influence, the multifaceted ways in which French has influenced English by examining historical context, vocabulary, grammar, phonetics, and sociolinguistic factors.

Keywords: *the English language, the French language, vocabulary, linguistics, borrowed words*

Nərgiz Aliyeva

“AzerGold” QSC

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-8450-469X>

nargiz.aliyeva@azergold.az

Fransız dilinin ingilis dilinə təsiri

Xülasə

İngilis dili yarandığı gündən bugünədək müxtəlif mədəniyyət və müxtəlif dillərin təsiri altında nəzərəcərpacaq bir inkişaf yolu keçmişdir. Bu inkişafa ən çox töhfə verən dillərdən biri məhz fransız dili olmuşdur. İngilis dili fransız dilinin dərin təsirinə məruz qalmış və bu təsir ingilis dili lüğətinin, qrammatikasının və orfoqrafiyasının formalaşmasında mühüm rol oynamışdır. Bu, 1066-cı ildə İngiltərənin fəthi zamanı köhnə fransız dili ləhcəsində danışan normanların İngiltərəyə nəzarəti ələ keçirməsi ilə bağlıdır. Bu hadisələrin nəticəsi bu gün müasir ingilis dilinin strukturunda və leksikonunda əks olunmuşdur. İngiltərənin normanlar tərəfindən istilasından sonra ingilis dilində fransız lüğətində və dil strukturlarında olan nəzərəcərpacaq dəyişikliklər göründü. Bu məqalədə tarixi kontekst, lüğət, qrammatika, fonetika və sosial linqvistik amillər araşdırılmaqla fransız dilinin ingilis dilinə göstərdiyi çoxşaxəli təsirlərə nəzər salınmışdır.

Açar sözlər: *ingilis dili, fransız dili, lüğət, linqvistika, alınma sözlər*

Introduction

The influence of the French language on the English language can be traced back to the Norman Conquest of 1066, when William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, invaded England and assumed control over the Anglo-Saxon populace. This event marked the beginning of a profound transformation in the English language. French became the language of the ruling class and the court, while the majority of the population continued to speak Old English. The coexistence of these two languages created a unique linguistic environment, resulting in a gradual infusion of French vocabulary and phrases into English (Hughes, 2000, p. 15).

The Norman Influence

During the Norman period, many English speakers began to adopt French terms, particularly in areas such as law, government, art, and cuisine. Many legal terms, such as *jury*, *plaintiff*, and *verdict* have their roots in French. This adoption of vocabulary had long-lasting effects on the English legal system and contributed to the complexities of English vocabulary today.

The influence was most noticeable in the areas of governance, law, religion, and the arts. The administrative and legal systems, for example, saw the introduction of French terms like *court*, *government*, *parliament*, and *justice* (McWhorter, 2001, p. 95). Additionally, French words relating to culture and society, such as *beauty*, *fashion*, and *chivalry*, entered English during this period.

Vocabulary Borrowings

One of the most significant impacts of French on English is vocabulary borrowings. Estimates suggest that around 30% of English words are derived from French (31 English Words That Are Actually French, 2021).

French literature, music, and art have also extended into the English-speaking world throughout the centuries. With the spread of Francophone culture, it's currently estimated that English speakers who have never studied French can still recognize about 15,000 words in French (Terms of Enrichment: How French Has Influenced English, 2019). That's a lot of words, considering the average person uses about 16,000 words per day. You may hear words like *cliché*, *déjà vu*, and *faux pas* in everyday speech. These words are directly taken from French and haven't changed at all.

The development of English grammar

Though English grammar was less affected by French than its vocabulary, there were some notable changes. The adoption of French helped simplify certain aspects of English syntax and grammar. For instance, the shift from a case system in Old English to the simplified structure of Modern English can partly be attributed to French influence (Lass, 1997, p. 232). The French language, with its fixed word order and reliance on prepositions, may have influenced the development of English sentence structure.

Research

Additionally, French influence also helped shape English morphology, especially with the use of suffixes to form new words. For example, many English words that end in *-tion* (such as *nation*, *creation*, and *station*) are derived from French forms ending in *-tion* (Giegerich, 1992, p. 214).

Surprisingly, we still use some phrases today that are influenced by French grammar.

Particularly in the fields mentioned above where French has heavily influenced the vocabulary, French grammar plays a prominent role in seniority and titles.

Titles like *consul general* and *agent-general* retained the original French grammar rule of nouns followed by adjectives. In the military, similar titles like *lieutenant general* and *brigadier general* are also used.

These borrowings can be categorized into several thematic areas.

1. Law and Governance

French had a profound influence on legal terminology. Words such as *court*, *judge*, and *defendant* were all borrowed from French during the medieval period. The legal profession adopted these terms as they were consistent with the feudal system brought by the Normans (Burnley, 2000, p. 103).

2. Culture and Cuisine

French borrowings have significantly enriched both culture and cuisine in various regions around the world. In culinary contexts, terms like *café*, *bistro*, and *croissant* have seamlessly integrated into English, reflecting the influence of French gastronomy on global food culture.

3. Fashion and Art

French contributions to the arts, such as *film noir* in cinema and *chanson* in music, highlight the cultural exchanges that have shaped modern artistic expressions.

English pronunciation

The influence of French on English pronunciation is also evident in the way certain words are spoken. The Norman period led to a softening of certain consonant sounds in English, reflecting

French pronunciation patterns. For example, the French word *rendezvous* was adopted into English with a similar pronunciation. Furthermore, French has influenced English spelling, particularly with the introduction of silent letters, as in words like *debt*, *doubt*, and *receipt* (Morpurgo-Davies, 1989, p. 154).

French is known for having very different pronunciation rules than English, but most people don't realize that English also borrows some French pronunciation rules.

Some vocal sounds that French has contributed to English include the "g" sound in *mirage*, the "v" in *vacation*, and the "z" in *zigzag*. French is a beautiful language to listen to, and its influences on English pronunciation have added an additional layer of beauty in English (The Influence of French on the English Language, 2022).

Writing in English

French spelling helped transform Old English into the modern English we speak today. As Simon Ager indicates in his article "The Influence of French on the English Language," words like *queen*, *ship*, and *should* used to be spelled *cwen*, *scip* and *scolde* (French Influence on English, 2021).

Phonetic Influence

In addition to vocabulary, French has influenced the phonetics of English. The introduction of French words brought new sounds and pronunciations to English, altering its phonetic system. For example, the use of nasal vowels and certain diphthongs in English can be traced back to French pronunciation (Crystal, 2000, p. 61).

Grammatical Structures

While much of the French influence on English is evident in vocabulary, there are also subtle influences on grammatical structures. The adoption of prepositions and certain syntactical patterns can also be traced back to French.

The introduction of French has led to the incorporation of various prepositions and phrases in English, enriching its syntactic structure. Prepositions such as "à" (to), "de" (of), and "en" (in) have found their way into English usage (Hughes, 2000, p. 29).

Contemporary Borrowings

In the modern world, French continues to contribute to English, especially in fields such as fashion, diplomacy, and cuisine. Terms like *avant-garde* and *à la carte* are commonly used, signifying the ongoing influence of French on the English lexicon. To name a few, the following borrowings are frequently used in every-day life of any English-speaking people today:

- **attaché** a person attached to an embassy; in French it is also the past participle of the verb *attacher* (= to fasten, to tighten, to be linked).
- **bon appétit** lit. "good appetite"; "enjoy your meal!"
- **bon voyage** lit. "good journey"; have a good trip!
- **bureau (pl. bureaux)** government office; an agency for information exchange. Also means "desk" in French, and in the U.K.
- **café** a coffee shop (also used in French for "coffee").
- **couture** lit. sewing. Fashion (usually refers to high fashion). *haute couture* in French.
- **croissant** a crescent-shaped bread made of flaky pastry; in French also the word for crescent.
- **décor** the layout and furnishing of a room.
- **déjà vu** lit. "already seen": an impression or illusion of having seen or experienced something before.
- **façade** the front of an edifice (from the Italian *facciata*, or face); a fake persona, as in "putting on a façade" (the ç is pronounced like an s).
- **fiancé(e)** betrothed; lit. a man/woman engaged to be married.
- **force majeure** an overpowering and unforeseeable event, especially when talking about weather (often appears in insurance contracts).
- **garage** covered parking
- **papier-mâché** lit. "chewed paper"; a craft medium using paper and paste.

- **tête-à-tête** lit. "head to head"; an intimate get-together or private conversation between two people.
- **voilà** lit. "see there"; in French it can mean simply "there it is"; in English it is generally restricted to a triumphant revelation (Glossary of French words and expressions in English, 2019).

Conclusion

The influence of French on the English language is a testament to the dynamic and evolving nature of linguistic interaction. From the Norman Conquest to contemporary times, French has enriched English vocabulary, introduced new grammatical structures, and influenced pronunciation. This intermingling of languages reflects historical events, cultural exchanges, and social changes, highlighting how languages can shape and transform one another. The enduring legacy of French in English not only enhances its richness and diversity but also serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of cultures. As English continues to evolve, the French influence will remain a vital part of it, illustrating the ongoing dialogue between languages in a globalized world.

References

1. Burnley, D. (2000). *The History of Th English Language: A Source Book*. Routledge.
2. Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486999>
3. French Influence on English. (2021). <https://prezi.com/p/upjxlsooj3hb/french-influence-on-english/>
4. Giegerich, H. (1992). *English Phonology: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
5. Glossary of French words and expressions in English. (2019). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_French_words_and_expressions_in_English
6. Hughes, G. (2000). *A history of English words*. Oxford (UK) & Malden (MA): Blackwell.
7. Lass, R. (1997). *Historical Linguistics and Language Change*. Cambridge University Press.
8. McWhorter, J. (2001). *The Power of Babel: A Natural History of the Human Language Family*. Times Books.
9. Morpurgo-Davies, A. (1989). *The History of the English Language*. Macmillan.
10. *31 English Words That Are Actually French*. (2021). <https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/english-words-that-are-actually-french>
11. *Terms of Enrichment: How French Has Influenced English*. (2019). <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-french-has-influenced-english-1371255#:~:text=About%20one%2Dthird%20of%20all,identical%20in%20the%20two%20languages>
12. *The Influence of French on the English Language*. (2022). <https://www.foreigntongues.co.uk/the-influence-of-french-on-the-english-language>

Received: 22.10.2024

Accepted: 13.02.2025