

Foreign words used in English

Lead-in task: How much do you know about the English language? Try to answer the following quiz questions.

1. Where did the English language originate?
A. Germany and the Netherlands B. Wales C. England

2. Approximately how many words are there in the English language?
A. 170,000 B. More than a million C. Between 20,000 and 30,000

3. What percentage of words in the English language actually have their origins in a different language?
A. 20 % B. 45% C. 80%

4. How many languages is it estimated that English has 'borrowed' words from?
A. 55 B. 380 C. 126

Task 1: Discuss these questions.

- What words can you think of that your language has borrowed from English?
- Do you know any words which English has borrowed from your language?

Task 2: Try to put these English 'loan words' into the correct group.

admiral anime bagel beef broccoli bungalow café candy caravan cockroach delicatessen entrepreneur glitch graffiti guerrilla khaki pyjamas rickshaw rucksack shampoo tsunami

Arabic	French	German	Hindi and Urdu
Italian	Japanese	Spanish	Yiddish

Task 3: Read the article and check your ideas.

English was originally brought to what is now called Britain by Anglo-Saxon settlers from northwest Germany, West Denmark and the Netherlands. But the language that we nowadays call English has been changed almost out of recognition by the passing of time, and even more influentially, the impact of other languages.

It is estimated that words borrowed from other languages make up around 80% of the English language. As the author James D. Nicoll has noted:

“We don't just borrow words; on occasion, English has pursued other languages down alleyways to beat them unconscious and rifle their pockets for new vocabulary.”

One of the reasons why English has such a huge vocabulary- estimated to be more than two million words, though not all are in current use- is that English has borrowed words from up to 350 other languages. Some of the biggest contributions come from Latin and Greek, and French- via the Norman invasion of 1066. We easily recognise such words as café and entrepreneur as being French, but a lot of much older words are too. For example, most of the words for meat, such as beef, mutton and pork come from French, and this explains why they are so different from the words we use to describe the animals themselves.

Arabic has given the language many words that most people would not recognise as anything but English. For example, admiral, caravan and candy. And the time the British spent in India, as a colonial power, has given the language Hindi or Urdu words such as bungalow, pyjamas, khaki and shampoo.

And then there are more modern borrowings, such as anime, tsunami and rickshaw from Japanese, guerrilla and cockroach (cucaracha) from Spanish, rucksack and delicatessen from German, broccoli and graffiti from Italian and glitch and bagel from Yiddish.

It is often remarked that English spelling and pronunciation is confusing and unpredictable, but once we start to recognise what a hotchpotch (derived from French) the language actually is, it all starts to make more sense.

Task 4: Read the article again and answer the following questions.

1. What explanation does the writer give for the prevalence of English words borrowed from French?
2. Why does the writer think the English language uses words from Hindi or Urdu?
3. What explanation does the writer give for the difficulty of English spelling and pronunciation?

Task 5: Look at the list of words below and correct the spelling where necessary.

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|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. embarass | 9. proffesional |
| 2. ocassion | 10. immediatly |
| 3. accommodation | 11. foreign |
| 4. acquiese | 12. accessable |
| 5. reccommend | 13. afficionado |
| 6. responsable | 14. anniversery |
| 7. necessary | 15. ingenius |
| 8. pronounciation | 16. miniscule |