

# English Honours, U.G.-I, Paper-01

---

## Topic: BORROWINGS IN ENGLISH

English is generally regarded as the richest of the world's languages. Few other languages can match this world power. English owes its exceptionally large vocabulary thanks to its ability to borrow and absorb words from outside. "The English language" observed Ralph Waldo Emerson, "is the sea which receives tributaries from every region under heaven."

The English language has been enriched throughout its history by borrowings from foreign languages. A borrowing (a loan word) is a word taken over from another language and modified in phonemic shape, spelling, paradigm or meaning according to the standards of the English language. It's true that English vocabulary which is one of the most extensive amongst the world's languages contains an immense number of words of foreign origin. In our report we want to introduce the groups of borrowings.

### Latin and Greek borrowings

English has taken over words from most of the other languages with which it has contacts. It has taken many words from the ancient languages, Latin and Greek, and these borrowings usually have academic or literary association (*per capita, dogma, drama, theory, pseudonym*).

Scientists point out three periods of borrowings in old English: Latin-Continental borrowings, Latin-Celtic borrowings, Latin borrowings connected with the Adoption of Christianity. To this periods belong military terms (*wall, street, etc.*), trade terms (*pound, inch*), names of containers (*cup, dish*), names of food (*butter, cheese*), words connected with building (*chalk, pitch*), etc. Roman influence was felt in the names of towns (*Manchester*).

With the Adoption of Christianity mostly religious or clerical terms were borrowed: *dean, cross, alter, abbot* (Latin); *church, devil, priest, anthem, school, martyr* (Greek). Latin and Greek borrowings of the Middle English period are connected with the Great Revival of Learning and are mostly scientific words: *formula, inertia, maximum, memorandum, superior, etc.* There are some classical borrowings in Modern English as well: *aspirin, iodine, atom, calorie, acid, etc.* There are words formed with the help of Latin and Greek morphemes (roots or affixes): *tele, auto, etc.*

### French borrowings

French is the language that had most influence on the vocabulary of English; it also influenced its spelling. After the Norman invasion, English was neglected by the Latin-writing and French-speaking authorities. Northern French became the official language in England. There are several semantic groups of French borrowings: government terms: *to govern, to administer, assembly*; words connected with feudalism: *peasant, servant, money*; words connected with jury: *plaintiff, judge, fine*; words connected with art, fashion, food: *pleasure, appetite, beauty, figure, etc.*

Early French borrowings were fully assimilated; the opposite tendency is to be discerned in the later French borrowings. During the 17th century there was a change in the character of the borrowed words. English took lots of words to do with cooking, the arts, and a more sophisticated lifestyle in general (*prestige, leisure, resume*). French borrowings of the period of the Norman Conquest became part of the English vocabulary. The number of borrowings was so large that it became possible to borrow morphemes and form word-hybrids, e.g.: god – goddess, short — shortage, bewilder – bewilderment.

### Scandinavian borrowings

Scandinavian Borrowings are connected with the Scandinavian Conquest of the British Isles, which took place at the end of the 8th century. Scandinavians belonged to the same group of peoples as Englishmen and

the two languages were similar. The impact of Old Norse on the English language is hard to evaluate. Nine hundred words - for example, take, leg, hit, skin, same - are of Scandinavian origin. There are probably hundreds more we cannot account for definitely.

However, many words were borrowed into English, e.g. coke, egg, kid, window, ill, happy, ugly, to call, to give, etc. Pronouns and pronominal forms were also borrowed from Scandinavian: same, both, though, they.

### **Other groups of borrowings**

English has taken over words from most of the other languages with which it has had contacts: over 120 languages are on record as sources of the English vocabulary. From Japanese come *karate*, *judo*, *hara-kiri*, *kimono*. From Arabic, *algebra*, *fakir*, *giraffe*, *mattress*. From Turkish, *yogurt*, *kiosk*, *tulip*; from Eskimo, *kayak*, *anorak*; from Yiddish, *gay*, *knish*, *latke*, *schmuck*. From Italian come words connected with music and the plastic arts. German expressions in English have been coined either by tourists bringing back words for new things they saw or by philosophers or historians describing German concepts or experiences (kindergarten, blitz, hamburger, delicatessen, waltz, seminar). The borrowings from other languages usually relate to things, which English speakers experienced for the first time abroad (Portuguese: marmalade, cobra; Spanish: junta, siesta, patio, mosquito; Dutch: dock, leak, pump, yacht, easel, cruise; Finish: sauna; Russian: tsar, balalaika).

“Loan-words have been called the milestones of philology, because in a great many cases they permit us to fix approximately the dates of linguistic changes. But they might with just as much right be termed some of the milestones of general history, because they show us the course of civilization [ ], and in many cases give us valuable information as to the inner life of nations». O. Jespersen