

French/English Translation: The Unusual History of the English Language

Along with the other major languages of Western Europe, both English and French are descendants of proto-Indo-European. English is a Teutonic language, derivative of proto-Germanic via West Germanic (along with Dutch, Yiddish and German); French is a Romance language, derivative of proto-Italic via Latin (along with Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan and Romanian). Though French and English are long-since separated on the Indo-European genealogy, the complex history of English and the role French plays in this chronicle create a few interesting issues in French/English translation.

English is frequently depicted as a Germanic language with a Romance lexicon. Old English started out as the language of various tribes of northern Europe – the Jutes, Angles, and Saxons – who strayed to the British Isles and dislodged the Celts. Once the Normans had appropriated England in 1066, Norman French became the language of the royal court, relegating English to the lingo of the common folks. As usage was confined to the day-to-day in this time period, English pared itself down and turned into Middle English, the language of Geoffrey Chaucer. The Normans retained command of the British throne for more than 300 years and, as they reigned, many words rolled into English. By the time English got back into favor as the main language of the Isles, it had metamorphosed into Early Modern English, the language in which William Shakespeare composed his sonnets and dramas. It is reckoned that from one quarter to one third of modern-day English vocabulary is descended from French.

Linguistic adoption has not been a unilateral phenomenon in the history of French/English relations. With the ascension of the English language as the planetary lingua franca of science and business, many English neologisms have been brought into French directly. The French Academy, the guard dog body that patrols the French terminology, has tried to restrain the number of adoptions, but its success has been moderate.

Throughout the history of the English language, considerable vocabulary has been adopted from diverse phases of Latin. The Jutes, Angles and Saxons opposed and bartered with the Romans before relocating to the British Islands and had thus already acquired some Latin phrases before the coalescence of Old English. Christian missionaries to England brought in with them Latin spiritual terms and more words were adopted during the English Renaissance. During the Industrial period and up to modern days, newfound knowledge and engineering science is frequently designated by direct Latin borrowings or coinages created from Latinate roots. This has resulted in the doubles for which the English is famous: a native Teutonic noun coupled with a Latinate adjective, for instance: eye and visual/ocular, arachnidian and spider. Additionally a quarter of English words are derived from Latin.

The extraordinary history of the English language and its relation to contemporary French simplifies a great deal in French/English translation because there is a extensive body of cognate words that require no to little change, such as direct borrowings from English into French (marketing, weekend); direct borrowings from French into English (moustache, ballet); and Latin derivatives common to both languages (molecule, allusion). Those performing English/French translation must be aware however, of the many delusive cognates, known as 'false friends,' in the two nomenclatures. Some are homographs with entirely different significances, such as coin ('neighborhood' in French, a form of money in English), or chair ('flesh' in French, a place to sit in English). More critical are analogous words that have acquired easily mistakable senses, such as eventually/eventuellement ('possibly'), actually/actuellement ('currently'), or to attend/attendre ('to wait').

In brief, due to the vagaries of history, French/English translation is relatively easy compared to other language pairs. The large body of cognates and mutual Indo-European base make the two languages more similar than dissimilar.

About the Author

Armando Riquier is a freelance translator working with Tectrad, a translation company specialized in finance and legal translations between English, French and other key languages. Discover how Tectrad's [French English translation](#) services can provide you with the high degree of professionalism you need when communicating to your international clients.

Source: <http://www.articletrader.com>