

The History of the English Language

The Normans in England

Dr. Basima Othman

The History of the English Language

Type	Event	Language	Date
Old English	Celt Migration	Celtic	200 BC
	The Roman Occupation	Latin	43-410 AD
	Germanic Settlements	Anglo-Saxons (runes)	449 AD
	Viking Invasions	Old Norse	787-1000 century
Middle English	Norman Invasion	Old French	1000-1500 century
Early Modern English	Renaissance Mixing	French, Latin, Greek, Italian	1500-1800 century
Late Modern English	Empire Imports	Different Languages	1800- present

The Vikings Invasions

(from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden)

In the 8th century, Britain was visited by the **Vikings**. From 787 they came in many small groups and they stole gold and silver from towns and churches in Britain.

In 850, a large Viking army took London and Canterbury, and so the war began which continued until 878. Then **King Alfred** (the Anglo-Saxon king of Wessex from 871 to 899) won an important battle and made an agreement with the Vikings to separate England into two parts. After that, the northern and eastern part, known as the Danelaw, was controlled by the Vikings, and the rest of England was controlled by **King Alfred**.

The Beginning of the Battle of Hastings

Battles between the Vikings and the English continued in the 10th century. From 1016 to 1041, England had Danish kings, who were then followed by an English king, **Edward**. When Edward died in 1066, **Harold**, the leader of Wessex, was chosen to be the next king. However, **William**, one of **Edward's cousins**, said that Edward had promised that he would become king of England.

William was the leader of Normandy in northern **France**. He decided to take an army to England and fight **Harold** in the Battle called **Hastings**.

The Normans in England

At the Battle of **Hastings**, in 1066, King **Harold** was killed and his army was defeated by the Normans. On Christmas Day 1066, **William** was made king of England in London, and over the next four years, he completed his conquest of England and Wales. This conquest had a very great effect on the development of the English language.

William had large stone castles built, from which Norman soldiers controlled the towns and countryside. He took very large areas of land from rich English families and gave them to his Norman followers. Each of these new landowners had his own group of soldiers, and each gave land to his own followers, so there was usually one Norman family in each English village. Normans worked in the government and business and controlled the church.

The Normans in England

Norman-French immediately became the language of the governing classes and remained so for the next two hundred years. **French** and **Latin** were used in government, the Church, the law, and literature. Very little was written in English, although English monks continued writing The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle until 1154. English was still spoken, however, in its different regional dialects.

The use of **French** continued in England during the twelfth century, partly because many of the Norman kings and landowners also had land in Normandy and other parts of France and they spent a lot of time there. French was not spoken only by people of Norman or French blood. It was also spoken by **English people who wanted to be important.**

The Normans in England

Slowly, however, **English** became more widely used by the **Normans** for several reasons. (1) Many of the Normans married **English women**, so they and their children spoke English. (2) In 1204, King John of England lost Normandy to the king of France, and during the next fifty years, all the great landowning families in England had to give away their lands in France. They became less involved with France and began to feel that England was their country.

(3) The **upper** classes continued to speak French as a **second** language, and it was still used in government and the law. However, **French** started to become **less** important socially in England, partly because the Norman French spoken in England was not considered 'good' by speakers of Parisian French in France. The upper classes began to feel prouder of their English than of their French.

The Normans in England

(4) **Ordinary people** did not need to learn French and probably did not want to. It was the language of the Normans, who had destroyed many English towns and villages. English was the language of the country, and people were proud of it and of their history.

(5) The continuing **bad feeling** between **England** and **France** resulted in the Hundred Years War (1337-1453). During this time, national feeling grew and the English language was seen more and more as an important part of being English.

The Normans in England

(6) Between 1348 and 1375, England was hit several times by the illness known as **the Black Death** (the Plague) and almost a third of the people in England died. Many churchmen, monks, and school teachers died and were replaced by less educated men who spoke only English.

There were fewer ordinary working people, so they could ask for better conditions from the landowners. Many left the land and went to work for more money in the towns.

English had survived - but it had changed

As ordinary people became more important, their language - **English**- became more important too. It was used more and more in government, as fewer and fewer people could understand French.

In 1362, English was used for the first time at the opening of **Parliament**. When Henry the Fourth became king in 1399, England had its first English-speaking king since 1066.

In the following century, English took the place of French in the home, in education, and in government. It also became the language of written communication so that after 1450 most letters were in English, not Latin.

English had survived - but it had changed.