

# ENGLISH-ITS ORIGIN,CURRENT ROLE AND INFLUENCE IN TODAY'S GLOBAL SOCIETY.



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The English language that is so widely used throughout the world today is both an academic language (much of the research in many areas of knowledge is conducted and reported on in English) and a universal language (again, much of the world trade and diplomacy conducted between countries from different continents are conducted in English). The English language has a long history and is a result of the fusion of dialects spoken by the

Teutonic tribes who came to England around the year 449. In that year, England was invaded by the Teutonic tribes, the founders of the modern English nation that we know today. Research by early historical linguists have revealed that the Teutonic tribes which invaded and eventually conquered England consisted of four main tribes, namely, the Jutes, Saxons, Angles, and Frisians.

Consequently, the English language is

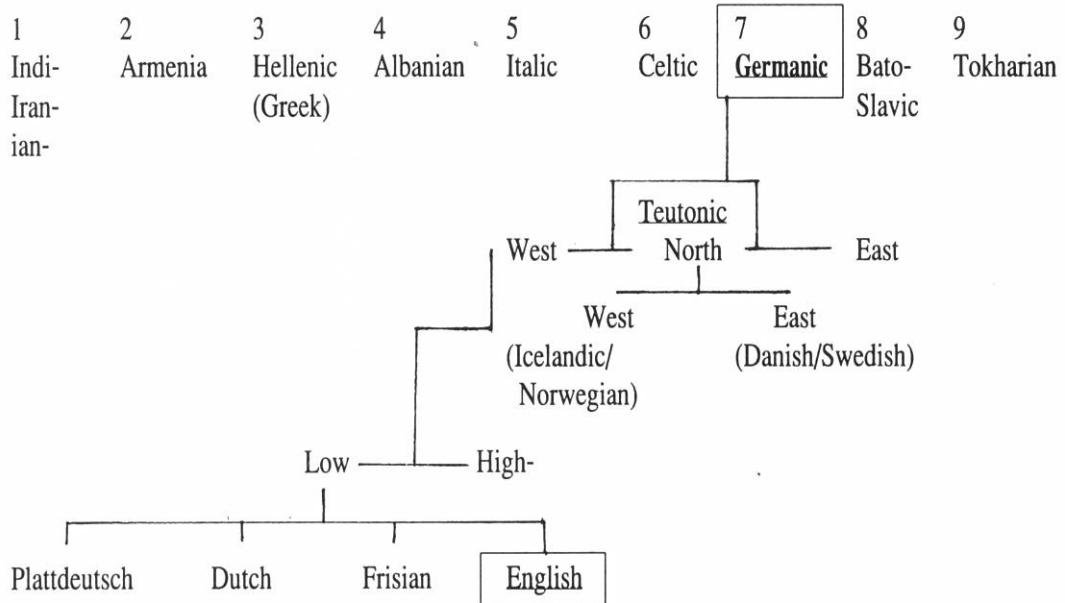
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linguistically part of what historical linguists refer to as the Low West Teutonic branch of the Indo-European family of languages and

which relates to the other family of languages in the same linguistic family of Indo-European languages as follows.

### Indo-European Family of Languages



The English language, therefore, is linguistically classified as being a language belonging to the Indo-European family of languages. It is from the Low, West, Teutonic, Germanic branch.

A characteristic common to Germanic languages (including English) is the division of the verb into two categories-weak verbs and strong verbs. In modern English, such characteristics are called regular and irregular verbs. This is referred to as weak verbs

(regular) and strong verbs (irregular) by historical linguists.

The so-called strong verbs (such as begin, began, begun) which represent the basic Indo-European family of languages are so called by historical linguists since they are capable of a change in the root vowel ie. /I/ to /ae/ to /ən/ in order to indicate past tense and past participle. Weak verbs, on the other hand (such as play, played, played) need to add either one of the inflections /-d/ or /-ed/.

Looking at the historical development of the English language as a whole, it is possible to divide such linguistic changes over time into 3 main phases or periods; the period from 450 to 1150, known by linguists as the period of "Old English". In this period, the English language had many more inflections than the English of today; the period from 1150 to 1500 is known as the period of "Middle English". During this period, the inflections in the English language began to break down; the last period from 1500 up to present time, is known as the period of "Modern English".

Today's "modern English" that is used world-wide has lost much of its inflections, although still classified by linguists as an inflectional type of language (as opposed to the Thai language which is described as an isolating type of language). We still have inflections such as "do, did, done; begin, began, begun," etc, but in comparison to the earlier period of "Old English", "Modern English" has much less inflections. Consequently, some linguists refer to the "Modern English" period as the period of "lost inflections."

Nevertheless, modern English, as we know and use it today, still uses a lot of inflections. English verbs are conjugated such

as go, went, gone ; begin, began, begun etc."

Let us now turn to the role of English as a first and second language for hundreds of millions of people around the world. It has been estimated that there are around 300 to 350 million speakers of English as a first language. Yet, it is its development as a second language where the future of English today lies. Apart from the increasing possibilities of other languages (as a world language) such as Spanish, French, German, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, etc., the English language still holds a unique position in this regard (as a world language) for several reasons. Firstly, it is a native language of two very influential nations, namely, the United States and the United Kingdom. Secondly, it is also used around the world in both writing and speech. It is estimated that three-fifths of the world's radio/t.v. stations broadcast in English and that three-fourths of the world's mail (postal service) is written in the English language. It is to be noted also that today's internet is conducted mainly in English around the world.

Why is this so? There are several reasons. Unlike languages such as Japanese and Chinese, the English writing system is alphabetical, thus making it easier to type and

print, a necessity in developing textbooks, reporting research, and publishing of newsprint.

As a second language, English has replaced French in Schools in Asia and Latin America. In the 21 st century, a more highly interdependent world (age of globalization, or, in Thai, "yuk lokapiwat"), will need to rely on bilingualism (English plus the local or national language) to carry out its affairs. It has been estimated that by the turn of the next century, most people around the world will be using some form of English, either as a first or as a second language.

The trend in English is for an increase in the actual number of words in the language. Linguists have estimated that a thousand years ago, Old English contained only around 37,000 words. Today, English dictionary entries contain over 500,000 entries. If this trend continues, the number of English words might even double. Several reasons account for this increase. The borrowing of "foreign words" is one; another important reason is the "invention" of new words either through the "coining" of new words or through new usage of words existing in English but with added new meaning.

Part of the reason for the coining of new English words derives from necessity due

to the development of the media and science and information technology. Today, we have words such as "internet, networking, satellite dish, modem, hard copy, fax, cellular, phone-link, pager, system down, data base, print-out, laser disc, nuke, sun-bloc, walk-man, disc-man, laptop, computer virus, (computer) mouse, space module, solar panel, fast food," To mention just a few new English words which were "coined" in order to cope with the advances in today's modern science and technology.

But, along with modern conveniences and technological advances, modern society has also acquired new problems, one of which is the spread of pollution and environmental degradation. Today's English contains such words as "toxic emission, bio-degradable, atmospheric pollution, toxic chemical, world reserve, endangered species, environmentalists, toxicants, pollutants, quantitative risk assessment, carcinogens, emission control, environmental regulation," etc.

Other new English words came into the language as a result of politico-economic developments. Such words as "boat-people, third-world countries, economic refugees, U.N. sanction, peace-keeping force, global-commitment, multinational, ethnic-cleansing," etc, are

now quite common-place.

If we look at other areas such as music and the entertainment industry, we will find other new words such as "rap music, roxy music, funk music, digital audio, soul music, etc".

With today's advances in information technology, we are likely to see an even wider spread of the English language. Globalization has had a rather positive effect on the English language. The influence of the English language in the area of "linguistic borrowing/ loan words" is also highly evident in the increase of "foreign origin words" being introduced into the Thai language. Some of the "loan words" have been used so much in spoken Thai that they are almost not recognized by Thai users as "loan words", often with English origins. The younger generation of Thai speakers frequently (and subconsciously) use such words as follows:

(THAI usage)	(ENGLISH origin)
/fUtpad/	footpath
/tiwi/	t.v.
/aytIm/	ice-cream

/wIdio/	video
/kratch/	clutch
/blake/	brake (of a car)
/wItamIn/	vitamin
/saempu/	shampoo
/k>ndo/	condominium

This is just to mention a few of such "borrowings" from English into the Thai language. And, today's younger generation has successfully and enthusiastically coined their own Thai adaptations of English words such as the following: /sIŋ/ from the English "racing"; /pUb/ from the English "public house (tavern); /tɛk/ from the English "discoteque", /mou /from the English "to mouth" (to say something about someone), and so on.

Today, the English language belongs to the world. It represents the past, present, and future of our globalized societies. It figures in world diplomacy, world trade and commerce. It is the official language spoken in several of the parliaments of the world such as India, Canada, the U.K., Kenya, Singapore and the U.S.A.. Those who ignore it do so at their own peril! □ □

### References

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