

Where Does English Come From?

A Brief History of the Language You're Learning – ECS Scotland

1. Did You Know?

- English is spoken by over 1.5 billion people, but it hasn't always sounded the way it does today.
- Modern English includes words from Latin, French, Old Norse, and German — thanks to centuries of invasions, trade, and travel.
- Your vocabulary is more international than you think! For example:
 - Café, menu, language → from French
 - Kindergarten, rucksack, wanderlust → from German
 - Agenda, status, video → from Latin

2. Where English Comes From: A Quick Timeline

Date	What Happened?	Language Impact
500 CE	Germanic tribes arrived in Britain	Old English began – sounded more like German
800–1000s	Vikings invaded	Added Old Norse words like 'egg', 'sky', 'knife'
1066	Norman conquest	10,000+ French words entered English
1400s–1600s	Chaucer & Shakespeare	Shaped Middle and early Modern English
Today	Global use and internet	English continues to evolve daily

3. How is English Connected to Other Languages?

- English is part of the Indo-European language family — the same as:
 - Spanish, French, Italian (Romance languages)
 - German, Dutch, Swedish (Germanic languages)
 - Hindi, Persian, Greek and more

Try This: Think of a word you know in your native language and English. Is there a similar sound or meaning? They might be related!

4. Explore More: Language Maps and Tools

- LL-Map: Explore world language maps – <https://llmap.org/>

- Ethnologue: All the world's languages – <https://www.ethnologue.com/>
- EndangeredLanguages.com: Hear rare languages – <http://endangeredlanguages.com/>
- Multitree: See which languages are related to English – <http://multitree.org/>
- TED-Ed: How Languages Evolve – <https://ed.ted.com/lessons/how-languages-evolve-alex-gendler>

5. Bonus Vocabulary Challenge

Try grouping these words into their language family origins:

Justice – Kindergarten – Video – Café – Wanderlust – Parliament – Agenda – Sky – School –
Flavour – Chef – Rucksack



Answers available in class



While You Watch: Answers

1. What do the dialects spoken in dozens of countries have in common with Chaucer's writings or Beowulf?

→ They are all part of the English language, which has evolved over generations, changing through history but remaining connected.

2. What caused so many French and Latin words to enter the English language?

→ The Norman invasion of England in 1066 brought a ruling class that spoke French, introducing many French and Latin words.

3. Where did Old English come from?

→ It came from Germanic dialects spoken by the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes who arrived in the 5th and 6th centuries.

4. How did Viking invasions affect English?

→ The Vikings added words from Old Norse, influencing vocabulary and pronunciation (e.g. "skirt" and "skull").

5. What is Proto-Germanic?

→ It's the ancient ancestor of Germanic languages like English, German, and Swedish, spoken around 500 BCE.

6. What is Proto-Indo-European and where was it spoken?

→ It's the ancient common ancestor of many modern languages, spoken about 6,000 years ago in modern Ukraine/Russia.

7. How do linguists trace the roots of English?

→ By comparing sound changes, grammar patterns, and vocabulary across related languages (comparative linguistics).

8. Why don't we have written records of Proto-Germanic or Proto-Indo-European?

→ These languages were spoken before writing systems existed, so they had to be reconstructed through comparison.

9. What are some languages distantly related to English?

→ Hindi, Persian, and Celtic languages — they all belong to the Indo-European language family.

10. What is one amazing fact at the end of the video?

→ Nearly 3 billion people today speak versions of English shaped by 6,000 years of history.