

THE GREEK & LATIN

FIFTH EDITION

ROOTS

OF ENGLISH



TAMARA M. GREEN

The GREEK & LATIN
ROOTS *of* ENGLISH

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Tamara M. Green

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Preface

“Language is a city to the building of which every human being brought a stone.” Ralph Waldo Emerson's words are a recognition that the development of language and the ways in which we use it have been, in large measure, historically and culturally determined. But it is also true that not only do individuals and cultures shape language but language shapes us; the way we speak and what we say define us and allow us to articulate our worldview. Ideas take on life only when we can give them expression, and one of the ways by which we do this is through our ability to use language. The more adept we are at this, the greater are our opportunities to explore and create and interpret the variety of our experiences.

Because language is a social product, it is constantly changing, not only structurally, but in the very meaning of words. No language perhaps offers a better opportunity to understand linguistic change than English, especially in the realm of vocabulary. English has absorbed vocabulary from other languages, but as a result of both the accidents of history and the great esteem in which ancient Greek and Roman culture had been held in the European tradition, over 60 percent of all English words have Greek or Latin roots; in the vocabulary of the sciences and technology, the figure rises to over 90 percent. Thus, through the study of the Greek and Latin roots of English, students not only can expand their knowledge of English vocabulary, but also come to understand the ways in which the history of the English language have shaped our perceptions of the world around us.

The approach of this text is thematic: vocabulary is organized into various topics, including politics and government, psychology, medicine and the biological sciences, literature, ancient culture, and religion and philosophy. Unlike those textbooks that treat Latin and Greek roots separately, these lessons present the two vocabularies as an organic whole. Thus, the emphasis is placed on language and the way in which it has developed and changed, rather than on single words, or even groups of words. The exercises at the end of each chapter are cumulative, reinforcing both vocabulary already learned and analytical skills developed in previous lessons. In addition to teaching vocabulary skills, the text has another, perhaps more subtle, aim. It is hoped that through the study of the Greek and Latin roots of English, students will begin to learn the pleasures (and pitfalls) of language study.

The original development of the materials for this text was made possible by a grant to Hunter College from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

NEW MATERIAL IN THE FIFTH EDITION

The fifth edition has retained the organizational and thematic approach of the earlier editions. New material and exercises have been added to all chapters.

HOW TO USE THIS TEXT

1. In the vocabulary, both the nominative and genitive cases are given for all Latin nouns and adjectives. The principal parts of Latin verbs are also given.
2. An English word followed by Greek in parentheses indicates that the word is Greek in origin.
3. Because most words in English that are derived from Greek are learned borrowings, the genitive case of a noun or adjective is rarely cited, unless the compound form of the word is derived from

that case.

4. ~~Vocabulary words are sometimes repeated in different chapters when necessary.~~
5. Vocabulary words are generally listed in alphabetical order.

Symbols and Abbreviations Used

<i>Symbol or Abbreviation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
=	English meaning
>	from which is derived
<	derived from
cf.	<i>compare</i>
e.g.	<i>for example</i>

Instructor's Manual

An Instructor's Manual is available to adopters of this text. It contains:

- Answers to all the exercises in the text
- Quizzes on each chapter
- Two final examinations
- Answers to all quizzes and final examinations
- Supplementary exercises, including answers
- Suggested English derivatives for chapters 3–8

Photographs

All photographs, unless otherwise attributed, are from the author's private collection.

A POLYGLOT STEW

(Or Food for Thought)



*When you cook a crane, make sure that the head does not touch the water, but is outside it.
When it has been cooked, wrap it in a warm cloth and pull its head.*

APICIUS (first-century CE Roman gourmet)

I'M SO HUNGRY!

If, in fact, we are what we eat, the American people are the most cosmopolitan nation in the world. Just as the English language is a mixture of Germanic, Latin, and Greek roots with a heavy seasoning of the Romance languages, with just a dash of Native American, African, and Caribbean, and a sprinkling of Asian vocabulary, so does our diet reflect the various linguistic ingredients that go into the melting pot of American cuisine.

The Normans conquered England in 1066 CE, and introduced, via French, Latin-based names for various foods; nevertheless, although English tastes and vocabulary were about to be expanded, the Germanic contribution to the English *menu* did not disappear. For example, Middle English *mete* made peace with the Old French *boef*, thus allowing both meat and beef on the dinner table, while the Germanic-based *chiken* nested quite comfortably with the French *poulet*. And if the English seemed to have lost their *appetite* after the Norman Conquest, the French tempted their *palates* with the introduction of such foods as *salmon, rice, and carrots*. French *pain*, however, never replaced Old English *bread*. Perhaps they found that too painful to contemplate.

The Normans may have introduced the English to the finer points of French cookery, but the spread of the British Empire introduced the English language to a host of new tastes from Asia, Africa, and North America. In turn, the extraordinary ethnic diversity of the United States has added its own linguistic flavors to American cuisine.

WHAT SHALL WE HAVE FOR DINNER?

We can eat geographically, as it were, starting off with some Latin-based *wine*, Gaelic *whiskey*, Russian *vodka*. The German cities of *Hamburg* and *Frankfort* give us two staples of the American diet whose flavor we can enhance with Chinese *ketchup*, French *mustard*, or a Dutch *pickle*. Or would you prefer Italian *pasta: linguini*, perhaps, or *spaghetti*, topped with some *cheese* from *Parma*, Italy? If you want to add a little spice to our lives, we can always order a *curry* at our local Indian *restaurant*, or call the neighborhood *pizzeria*.

Of course, a well-balanced diet needs a French *salad* filled with native and imported *vegetables*. The Native Americans of North and South America can provide *tomatoes, potatoes, squash, and avocados*, while the Arabs will contribute *spinach*. We can add a classical touch with *onions, lettuce, and peas*; even the lowly *radish* also has a Latin root.

And what is dinner without *dessert*? Some *fruit*, perhaps: an *orange* from Persia, or a *banana* from West Africa, or a much-traveled *apricot*, which passed from Latin into Arabic and then returned in Portuguese before making its way onto the English menu. If we crave something sweeter, however, what could be more American than *apple pie*? Or would you prefer some Central American *chocolate*, German *cake* or a *pretzel*, or perhaps a Dutch *cookie*? And you can wash it all down with some *coffee* from Turkey, or all the *tea* in China.

Vocabulary

appetite < Latin verb *appeto* = seek, desire
apple < Old English *aeppe*; cf. German *apfel*

apricot < the original form of the word in English, *apricock*, from the Portuguese *albricoque*, which in turn, came from the Arabic *al birquq*. The Arabic word, however, was a transliteration of a Latin adjective, *praecoquum* (early ripening), a term that could be applied to any fruit.
avocado < Spanish *aguacate* (< Nahuatl *ahuacatl* = testicle)
beef < Old French *boef* (< Latin *bos, bovis* = cow); cf. Modern French *boeuf*
bread < Old English *bread*; cf. German *brot*, **but** Latin *panis* > French *pain*, Italian *pane*, Spanish *pan*
cake < Middle English *kake*; cf. Icelandic *kaka*, German *kuchen*, Dutch *coek*. Cookie is a diminutive form of *coek*.
carrot < French *carotte* (< Latin *carota* < Greek *karoton*)
cheese < Latin *caseus*
chicken < Germanic *chiken*
chocolate < Nahuatl *chocolatl*
coffee < Turkish *kahve* (< Arabic *qahwah*) cf. French *cafe* (coffee shop), and *cafeteria*
cuisine = French *kitchen*; *cookery*
curry < Tamil *kari* (sauce)
dessert < French *desservir* (to clear the table)
fruit < Latin *fruor* = enjoy
lettuce < Latin *lactuca*
meat < Old English *mete*
menu = French *detailed list* (> Latin *minutus* = small)
onion < Latin *unio* (pearl)
palate < Latin *palatum* = roof of the mouth
pasta < Latin *pasta* (dough) (< Greek *pastos* = sprinkled). Originally, pasta was a kind of porridge sprinkled with salt.
pea < Latin *pisum* (cf. Italian *pisello*, French *pois*)
pie < Middle English *pie* (shallow pit) < Old French *puis* < Latin *puleus* (well)
pizza < Italian *pizza* < derivation unclear, but perhaps Latin *placenta* (cake)
potato < Spanish *patata* (< Taino *batata*)
poultry < Middle French *poulet* (< Latin *pullus* = young of any animal); cf. Spanish and Italian *pollo*
pretzel < German *bretzel* (< Latin *bracellus* = bracelet)
radish < Old English *raedic* (< Latin *radix* = root)
restaurant < Latin *restauro* (restore)
rice < Old French *ris* (< Italian *riso* Greek *oryzon* (rice))
salad < French *salade* < Latin *salata* (salted)
salmon < Latin *salmon, salmonis* = salmon
spaghetti < Italian *spago* (cord, rope) linguini < Latin *lingua* (tongue)
spinach < Old Spanish *espinaca* (< Arabic *isfanakh*)
squash < Narragansett Native American *askutasquash* (“thing eaten green”)
tea < Chinese *t'e* (Amoy dialect); the more common Chinese word is the Mandarin *ch'a*.
tomato < Spanish *tomate* (< Aztec *tomatl*)
vegetable < Latin *vegeo* (grow)
vodka < Russian *voda* (water)
whiskey < Gaelic *usqebaugh* (“the water of life”)
wine < Latin *vinum* (cf. French *vin*, and Italian and Spanish *vino*)

Note: A polyglot is someone who speaks many languages. You will learn the roots of this word very shortly.

LANGUAGE AND HISTORY

Κάλβιν Κλάιν

Erdaet Du kan
Förhundra skejsbrard
SONY

CHATS

Bertak
Bela
khabat
vsoott.
RÉS

आ. अंके किरसे में अचे जुहू चीन

اليانكيز الملاعين

Cinema
FICÇÃO
DE POLPA

BOOPЖEHHЫE CИЛЫ CШ

NEW YORK



And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech ... and they said, "Come let us build us a city, and a tower, with its top in heaven, and let us make us a name; lest we be scattered upon the face of the whole earth." And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built. And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is what they begin to do; and now nothing will be withholden from them, which they purpose to do. Come let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of the earth; and they left off to build the city. Therefore was the name of it called Babel, because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth.

GENESIS 11:1–9 (King James Version)

LANGUAGE FAMILIES

Language is a human activity, and like all human activities, it seems to have infinite variability. It is estimated that there are between 2,900 and nearly 10,000 living languages in the world.¹ Nevertheless, despite that variability, it is possible to distinguish the patterns and relationships of these languages from one another. As a result, they have been classified into families, the members of which are considered by linguists to be related because of similarities in structure, grammar, phonology, and vocabulary.

Yet, like every other kind of human activity, language is subject to change; and many languages have disappeared or evolved into other languages over the centuries. For example, Latin is no longer spoken, but it survives through its direct descendants, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Romanian. Other ancient languages survive only in written form, and still others have disappeared without a trace because they were not written down, and their speakers were absorbed into other populations.

What Were They Saying?

What was the first language? Philosophers and linguists, kings and theologians have debated this question for several thousand years. Early Christian scholars maintained that the language spoken in the Garden of Eden was Hebrew, while an eighteenth-century Swedish clergyman jokingly suggested that in the Garden, God spoke Swedish, Adam spoke Danish, and the serpent who tempted Eve spoke French.

The major families, or trees, of human languages have many branches.

Sino-Tibetan

Most languages spoken in China belong to the Sinitic branch of this family. There are more than a billion speakers of the eight varieties of Chinese that are regarded by some linguists as separate languages, united only by a common writing system.

More than 300 languages in the Tibeto-Burman branch are spoken in parts of Burma, Tibet, Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos.

Afro-Asiatic (Hamito-Semitic)

The Afro-Asiatic family includes over 250 languages that are spoken in North Africa and southwestern Asia. The Semitic languages, which include Arabic and Hebrew, as well as many of the languages of

the ancient Near East, constitute the largest branch of this family.

~~Among other languages belonging to this family are nearly 175 that are spoken in North Africa, including Amharic (the official language of Ethiopia) and Hausa, the primary language of more than 25 million people in West Africa.~~

Austro-Asiatic

There are three branches and over 100 languages that belong to the Austro-Asiatic family spread across southeast Asia. The largest of these branches is Mon-Khmer, which includes the languages of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and parts of Burma and Malaysia.

Dravidian

The Dravidian family is composed of more than seventy languages spoken primarily in southern and eastern India, although speakers are found as far away as southern and eastern regions of Africa. Although the vast majority of the population of India speaks languages that belong to the Indo-European family, the Dravidian languages are spoken by more than 230 million people. Tamil is the most diffuse, with 50 million speakers in India, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia, as well as other areas of the Indian and South Pacific Oceans.

Niger-Congo

It is estimated that there are between 1,000 and 3,000 languages spoken in Africa by over 400 million people², but fewer than 5 percent have more than a million speakers. The largest African language family is the Niger-Congo group, which encompasses about a thousand languages, and several thousand dialects. Within this family are the approximately 700 languages belonging to the Benue-Congo branch, which includes more than 500 Bantu languages, among them Swahili, Rwanda, Khongo, Xhosa, and Zulu. Since there is such an extraordinary diversity of African languages, Swahili or Arabic is often used as a *lingua franca*.³

Uralic

The two branches of the Uralic family are the Finno-Ugric languages, spoken in central and northern Europe (including Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian, and Lapp), and the much smaller group of Samoyedic languages that are spoken by perhaps 30,000 people scattered across Siberia and the Arctic.

Altaic

The geographical distribution of the Altaic languages ranges from the Balkan Peninsula to Central Asia, and includes over forty languages that are divided into three groups: Turkic, Mongolian, and Manchu.

The largest group, Turkic, includes Turkish, Uighur (whose speakers are found mainly in China) and the languages of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

Although Korean and Japanese share some similarities with other members of this family, the connections have not been determined precisely.

Caucasian

The region of the Caucasus Mountains, between the Caspian and Black Seas, contains the highest concentration of languages in the world; although smaller in area than Great Britain, more than twenty different languages are spoken there, but only Georgian has more than a million speakers.

Because this region formed part of the former Soviet Union, the vocabulary of these languages has

been heavily influenced by Russian.

North and South American Languages

At the time of the arrival of Europeans, there were perhaps 300 languages spoken by the indigenous inhabitants of North America. More than half of these have disappeared, with fewer than 300,000 speakers of these languages still remaining.

In South and Central America, there are approximately 11 million speakers of Amerindian languages. Among these is Quechua (the official language of the Incas and spoken by more than 10 million people). There once may have been as many as 2,000 languages spoken in South America.

Who Are You?

There are also some languages that are called “orphans” or “isolates,” single languages that seem to bear no relationship with any other, such as Ainu, a now nearly extinct language spoken in areas of Japan but unrelated to Japanese, or Basque, the language of the inhabitants of the Pyrenees region of Spain and France.

THE BRANCHES OF THE INDO-EUROPEAN TREE

The largest and most widely diffused of these language families is Indo-European, with over 2 billion speakers around the world. Of course the origins of all language families are difficult to pin down with any certainty, but historical and comparative linguists have constructed a model that would explain most fully the development of the Indo-European tree and the growth of its various branches. They posit a common ancestor of these languages that they label as Proto-Indo-European (PIE), a language thought to be spoken by a people living in what is now southwestern Russia and Kazakhstan about 6,000 years ago. As this population spread out in all directions, PIE evolved into dialects and then into mutually incomprehensible languages, but their common source could be established through similarities in grammatical structure and vocabulary. Here's an example:

<i>English</i>	<i>Sanskrit</i>	<i>Persian</i>	<i>Russian</i>	<i>Greek</i>	<i>Latin</i>
brother	bhrata	buradar	brat	phrater	frater

Linguists have classified the surviving branches of the Indo-European family as follows:

Indic

Hindi	Bengali	Gujarati	Marathi	Oriya
Punjabi	Romany	Sinhalese	Urdu	Sanskrit* ⁴

Iranian

Baluchi	Kurdish	Pashto	Farsi (Persian)	Avestan*
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Italic

Latin* >				
Italian	French	Spanish	Portuguese	Romanian

Hellenic

Ancient Greek* >	Medieval Greek* >	Modern Greek
------------------	-------------------	--------------

Germanic				
German	Dutch	Afrikaans	Flemish	Yiddish
Danish	Icelandic	Norwegian	Swedish	
Anglo-Saxon (Old English)* >		Middle English* >		Modern English
Balto-Slavonic				
Russian	Belorussian	Latvian	Lithuanian	Czech
Polish	Slovak	Slovene		
Celtic				
Breton	Gaelic	Irish	Scots	Welsh
Manx*	Cornish*			

Survivors, or Against All Odds

Some branches of the Indo-European tree have withered and disappeared; others, such as Armenian and Albanian, survive as a single offshoot.

Yes, languages die too, like individuals. They may decompose into fine dust or a heap of bones from which it is difficult to reconstruct the image of the living organism that was once there. They may be embalmed and preserved for posterity, changeless and static, lifelike in appearance but unendowed with the breath of life. While they live, however, they change.

—MARIO PEI, *The Story of Language*

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ENGLISH

Although English is classified as belonging to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European tree because of its structure, grammar, and basic vocabulary, it has been strongly influenced, through the accidents of history and politics, by other Indo-European languages, most notably Latin and its offshoots, the Romance languages, and, to a lesser extent, Greek.

Latin and the Power of Rome

At the height of its power in the second century CE, the Roman Empire extended from the Euphrat River in the East to Britain in the West. Everywhere in Europe and North Africa that the Romans went, they brought with them not only soldiers and government officials, but also their language; and therefore, in order to do business with the ruling powers, one had to learn at least a little Latin. Over several centuries, the Latin spoken in the provinces often became mixed with the local languages, out of which evolved the foundations of at least some of the languages spoken in Europe today.

By the fifth century CE, the Roman Empire had begun to disintegrate, as a series of invaders, mostly Germanic, began to carve out sections of the empire as their own. In 410 CE, the Roman army withdrew from Britain, leaving the island to its Celtic inhabitants and those Latin-speaking missionaries who had come to convert them to Christianity. But less than forty years later, beginning in 449 CE, southern Britain was overrun by the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, all Germanic tribes from the mainland of Europe.

Anglo-Saxon Culture and Old English

The culture and language of these Germanic peoples are called Anglo-Saxon; and within a relatively short period of time, they had become the dominant political and linguistic power in Britain, as the Celts fled west into Ireland and Wales. Although Latin had all but disappeared as a spoken language, its influence could be seen in place names: *-chester*, as in Dorchester, and *-caster*, as in Lancaster, which derive from the Latin *castra*, a military camp. And when the Anglo-Saxons were converted to Christianity in 597 CE, Latin was reintroduced, as the language of the Church.

The greatest work of Anglo-Saxon, or Old English, literature is the epic poem *Beowulf*, whose opening lines show how much English has changed in 1,500 years:

*Hwæt, we gardena in geardagum
peodcyninga prym gefrunon
hu ða æpelingas ellenfremedon!*⁵

The Norman Conquest and Middle English

The language spoken in England would have remained basically Germanic in its vocabulary, grammar, and structure, had it not been for an accident of politics and genealogy. In 1066 CE, Edward, king of England, died without an heir; and the Anglo-Saxon nobles elected Harold, who was not related to Edward, as their king. But perhaps out of family loyalty, perhaps out of a desire for more power, William, ruler of Normandy, whose wife was related to Edward, challenged Harold's right to the throne. William and his army invaded Britain, and at the battle of Hastings, Harold was defeated and killed. On Christmas Day, 1066 CE, William, now called the Conqueror, was crowned King of England and Normandy.

William brought with him a new ruling class, made up of French-speaking Normans,⁶ who imposed their politics, customs, and language on the Anglo-Saxons. And just as those who had wanted to do business with the Romans had had to learn Latin, so those who wanted to be accepted by the Norman power structure had to learn French. For nearly 150 years, French was the language of government, law, and religion. In the thirteenth century, however, as relations deteriorated between England and France, the use of English increasingly became an expression of nationalism; and English began once more to reassert itself. Nevertheless, in part because of the influence of French, in part because all languages change over time, it was radically different from the Anglo-Saxon of *Beowulf*. Thousands of new vocabulary words had been added to English either from French, a Latin-based language, or directly from Latin, with the result that today English contains twice as many words derived from French and Latin as from German. This newly evolved form is called Middle English, and although it is difficult for a speaker of modern English to read easily, it contains many recognizable forms and words, as the opening lines of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* demonstrates:

*Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour.*⁷

Modern English

Like Old and Middle English, Modern English has been shaped by a number of historical, political, and social events: the European Renaissance and the rebirth of interest in ancient Greek and Roman

literature and culture, the development of modern science and technology, British colonialism, and the founding of the United States. But perhaps the greatest single influence on the formation of Modern English was the printing press, whose invention is generally credited to the German Johann Gutenberg (d. 1468), and which was introduced into England by William Caxton in 1476. The invention led not only to the standardization of spelling⁸, usage, and pronunciation, but was instrumental in the growth of literacy, and in the increase in the number of schools. It is not surprising, then, that speech became an indication of social class.

Although Latin and Greek continued to be held in high esteem because of the renewed interest in the heritage of the classical tradition, the Renaissance and the rise of the modern nation-state saw the growth of vernacular⁹ literatures throughout Europe. Increasingly, it was maintained by many that the English language could be employed as effectively as Latin or Greek to express serious thought. After all, as a sixteenth-century English scholar pointed out, the ancient Greeks wrote in Greek, the Romans composed in Latin, and thus it was only natural that the English should employ their own native tongue. At the same time, however, there was the recognition on the part of at least some writers and scholars of a need for a greatly enriched English vocabulary. The coinage of new vocabulary by authors in this period added more than 10,000 new words to the language; ironically, the vast majority derived from Latin and Greek roots. Not all of these newly minted words, however, entered into popular usage, and some did not survive.

Not all of the new words were adapted from Latin or Greek. The argument among sixteenth-century scholars about the “purity” of English vocabulary grew more heated as diplomacy and trade broadened the possibility of linguistic interchange. Although as a matter of national pride vehement objections were raised about the introduction of Italian, French, and Spanish words into English vocabulary, many words, such as *vogue*, *essay*, *bizarre*, *piazza*, *mustache*, *gazette*, and *bravado*, found a permanent place.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the development of modern science, which also added thousands of new vocabulary words to English, was grounded, at least in part, in the view that all activity, including language, could be explained logically and rationally. The focus on standardization of language and usage also produced an increased interest in etymology, or the history of individual words, as a way of determining the precise meaning of words and their correct usage. In 1755, Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) published *A Dictionary of the English Language*, which contained 40,000 words and their definitions, pronunciations, and varied usages. Its intent, he said, was “to reserve the purity and ascertain the meaning of our English idiom.” Dr. Johnson's *Dictionary* was a landmark in the history of English lexicography, and marked the first methodical attempt to establish a standard English vocabulary. During the eighteenth century, there was also the attempt to regularize English grammar and syntax. Although the scientist Joseph Priestley argued that “the custom of speaking is the original and only just standard for any language,” most grammarians subscribed to Dr. Johnson's insistence that “every language must be formed after the model of one of the ancient.” As a result, they transposed the rules of Latin grammar onto English, despite the fact that at least a few scholars recognized that Latin grammar was not particularly well suited as a model for English.

With the growth of the British Empire, beginning in the seventeenth century, politics once again played a role in the history of the English language. Not only did the native languages of North America, Africa, and Asia contribute large numbers of words to English (such as *moccasin*, *jungle*, *hurricane*, and *tobacco*), but also colonialism led to the spread of the use of English around the world. By the mid-nineteenth century, the recognition that both the addition of “new” words to English vocabulary and the intricate history of the English language demanded a new kind of dictionary gave impetus to the monumental project that is known as the *Oxford English Dictionary*.¹⁰ Begun in 187

under the editorship of James Murray, the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* was not completed until 1928. Consisting of twelve volumes, it not only gave the various definitions and usages, but detailed the history of each of the over 400,000 entries. Successive teams of lexicographers have produced several supplements, and the *OED* now extends to twenty volumes and contains over 500,000 items.

The differences between a dialect and a language are a matter of great debate among linguists, since there is no accepted criterion for making any distinction between the two. The simplest definition is that it is a variety of a language that is characteristic of a particular group of the language's speakers. But who gets to determine what is "standard" and what is a "variety" is often a matter of politics, history, and social structure. As an old joke goes, "a language is a dialect with an army and a navy."

American English

England and America are two countries separated by the same language.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW (early twentieth-century playwright and critic)

Like the general history of English, the history of American English can be divided into periods. The earliest, and most influential, began with the first permanent English-speaking settlement in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607 and ended with the establishment of the United States as an independent country after the American Revolution. During this period, the majority of European settlers were from Britain, and they brought with them the speech patterns, vocabulary, and grammar of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England.

The American Revolution was grounded in the struggle for political independence, and at least for some, that meant linguistic independence as well. In 1774, an American patriot declared, "The English language has been greatly improved in Britain within a century, but its highest perfection, with every other branch of human knowledge, is perhaps reserved for this land of light and freedom." Perhaps the most noteworthy individual in the formation of American English is Noah Webster (1758-1843), who compiled three books: a speller, a grammar, and a reader. The speller was an extraordinary success and over the next century it would sell more than 80 million copies. His most lasting and influential work, however, was *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, which he wrote as a contribution "into the common treasure of patriotic exertions." Webster believed that a national language was an instrument of unity:

It is not only important, but, in a degree necessary, that the people of this country should have an American Dictionary of the English language; for, although the body of the language is the same as in England, and it is desirable to perpetuate that sameness, yet some differences must exist. Language is an expression of ideas; and if the people of our country cannot preserve an identity of ideas, they cannot retain an identity of language. (Preface to *An American Dictionary*, 1828)

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