
A Handbook of Grammar,
Vocabulary and Style

Cassell English Usage

Edited by Tim Storrie
and James Matson



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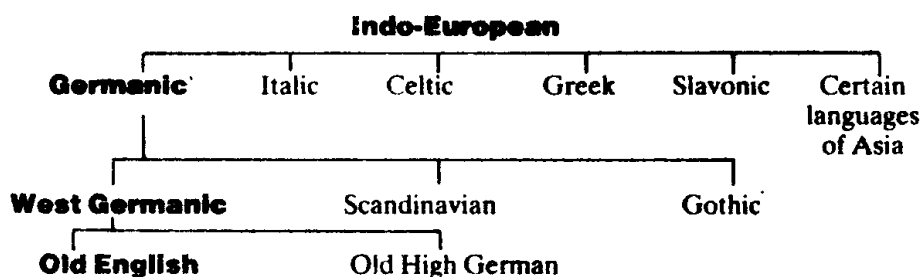
To Damian in loving memory

Introduction

The History of the English Language

1. An examination of most European and some Asian languages shows that they can be divided into several groups, the members of which resemble one another because they are derived from one original language. Thus English, with German, Dutch, Norwegian, Danish etc., belongs to the *Germanic* group of languages. All of these tongues were developed from a language spoken in prehistoric times by the early Germanic tribes. Similarly, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese etc. (called *Romance* languages, because they are derived from the speech of the Romans) are the offspring of Latin, which was one of the Italic family; Irish, Welsh, Scots Gaelic, Manx and Breton belong to the Celtic group; while Russian, Polish, Serbo-Croat etc. belong to the Slavonic group. Not only do the members of any one of these groups of languages exhibit strong resemblances one to another, but members of different groups also show signs of their relationship: European languages even show likenesses to languages of the Indian subcontinent and Iran. These facts have been accounted for by assuming that there existed thousands of years ago a language, called *Indo-European*, which was the common origin of the various groups described above.

2. The relationship of the various languages belonging to the Indo-European family is shown by the following family tree:



3. The English language was brought to England by the Germanic tribes (Angles, Saxons and Jutes) who settled here in the fifth and sixth centuries. Old English (i.e. the language spoken in England before the Norman Conquest) differed greatly from modern English in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar: in fact, a passage of English written in the time of King Alfred cannot be understood by a modern reader. Old English, like Latin and Greek, had a complicated system of *inflexions*; that is to say, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs etc. had many different forms according to their grammatical relationship. The vocabulary of the language was almost purely Germanic: very little borrowing from other languages had taken place.

4. English has changed greatly during the past thousand years. Many words have been added by groups of new settlers (notably Danes and Normans). Literary developments and scientific discoveries have been responsible for many borrowings

from Latin and Greek. The development of English vocabulary is looked at in more detail below.

5. Latin influence on English vocabulary:

(a) Latin began to influence our language before the Anglo-Saxons arrived in England. The Germanic tribes were in contact with the outposts of Roman civilization, and borrowed a few words, which are still to be found in the different branches of the Germanic group of languages: e.g.

street (Lat. *strata via*); *cheese* (Lat. *caseum*); *mint* (Lat. *moneta*).

(b) When the English tribes came to settle in this country, they came in contact with a people (the Britons) that had for long been part of the Roman Empire. It is probable that the educated population of the British towns spoke a form of Latin. Certainly they used a large number of Latin words, and some of these words passed into the language of the new conquerors. Latin borrowings of this period are distinguished by their form, because the Latin spoken in Britain had undergone considerable modification; e.g.

Chester (Lat. *castra*); *cowl* (Lat. *cucullus*); *provost* (OE *prafost*, Lat. *praepositus*).

(c) In the sixth century, Christianity was reintroduced into England by Roman missionaries. As the new religion spread, the English language adopted a large number of Latin words to express new ideas connected with the faith; e.g.

Pope (Lat. *papa*), *martyr*, *mass*, *monk*.

(d) In later times, especially since the Revival of Learning in the sixteenth century (which led to wide study of Latin and Greek literature), Latin words have frequently been borrowed from the literary language. Such words have changed little when passing from the one language to the other.

6. Scandinavian influence on English vocabulary. From the end of the eighth century to the time of Alfred, the Danes made continual raids upon the English coasts. The invaders eventually settled in East Anglia and the north and east of England. A century later the Danish king Svein invaded England, and eventually his son Canute (Cnut) became King of the English. These extensive Danish settlements had a strong influence on the language. Many words were borrowed by the English, such as *skin*, *skill*, *ill*, *get*, *leg*, *Thursday*, and the forms of the third person pronoun beginning with *th* (*they*, *their*, *them*).

7. French influence on English vocabulary. French influence is indirectly Latin influence, since the French language is derived from Latin; and so a very large proportion of English vocabulary is, either directly or indirectly, of Latin origin.

(a) After the Norman Conquest French, as spoken by the Normans, was the language of the ruling classes in this country, and was also used largely by Englishmen. Moreover, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century much French literature was translated into English. A large number of French words were thus incorporated in our language. Classified examples are:

- (i) Words for the flesh of animals used for food: *beef*, *mutton*, *veal*, *pork*. (The names of the living animals – *ox*, *sheep*, *calf*, *pig* – are English.)
- (ii) Words connected with the household: *master*, *servant*, *dinner*, *banquet*.
- (iii) Words connected with law, government and property: *court*, *assize*, *prison*, *custom*, *rent*, *price*.
- (iv) Names of titles: *duke*, *marquis*, *viscount*, *baron*.
- (v) Military terms: *battle*, *siege*, *standard*, *fortress*.

(vi) Words for the remoter relationships: *uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, cousin*.

(b) The Norman conquerors of England spoke the French dialect of Normandy and Picardy. When the Angevin dynasty came to the throne of England in the twelfth century, the dialect of central France became the language of the Court, and the borrowing of French words continued. Some words were borrowed twice, first from one dialect and then from the other:

catch – chase; warden – guardian; wage – gage.

(c) In the reign of Charles II there was close intimacy between the English and the French courts, and a knowledge of French language and literature was fashionable in England. Many French words thus passed into English, and the process has continued ever since that time:

campaign, memoir, prestige.

8. Greek Influence on English vocabulary. The Greek element in the English language is chiefly of modern origin, and is used mainly to express scientific ideas. New words from this source are constantly being introduced because it is very easy to coin words from Greek roots:

telegraph, philology, geology, gramophone, cybernetics.

9. The effect of the mixed nature of the English vocabulary. As an instrument of expression, English has been enormously improved by its borrowings from other languages. It has a greater wealth of synonymous words than most other languages, and is thus more capable of drawing precise and subtle distinctions. Very often we have a choice between a native English word and a synonym of Latin or French origin –

almighty – omnipotent; blessing – benediction; bloom – flower; calling – vocation; manly – virile; womanly – feminine.

In the course of centuries, many of these originally equivalent terms have acquired slightly divergent meanings, and our means of expression have thus been increased.

10. English today is a universal language, spoken not only as a mother-tongue in widespread portions of the globe, but as the official language of other vast areas. It is, moreover, employed as a *lingua franca*, an essential medium of communication, by politicians, scientists, technicians and men of letters of all nations.

Yet beneath the surface of English as a modern *lingua franca* there lies a multitude of differences between the language used by political representatives and international business people, and that spoken by ordinary people in informal or parochial situations. English today continues to enrich itself with words borrowed from foreign cultures. The requirements of the ever-expanding knowledge and culture of mankind have rightly called for new terms to meet needs of expression far removed from those in which the original language developed. With the spread of telecommunications and the emergence of multi-ethnic societies in English-speaking countries, such words have quickly become assimilated and are readily used by native English speakers as part of everyday speech.

Political events in the Middle East are reported in English-language newspapers in phrases which borrow directly from the Arabic, for example *intifada*, meaning uprising (especially of Palestinians in Israel), or *fatwa*, in relation to religious diktats (itself a German word) issued by Muslim leaders, or mullahs, such as the Ayatollah (the leader of Shiite Muslims in Iran).

The assimilation of foreign words is not confined to the sphere of current affairs. The growth in popularity of foreign cuisines in Great Britain, for example, has led

INTRODUCTION

to the familiarization of words derived from other European languages, such as *lasagne* (Italian), *wurst* (German), as well as from Chinese (*chow mein*) and Indian languages (*pilau rice*, *nan*).

In addition to its continuing enrichment from foreign sources, the English language is continually being changed from within. In North America, Australia, New Zealand and parts of Africa conditions have arisen over the years that have called for new words to express new directions of thought in terms and phrases particularly adapted to the circumstances. American English, through the worldwide cultural influence of Hollywood films and the adoption of American business practices and terminology across the Western world, has had a considerable impact on mainstream English vocabulary.

Within each country where English is the native tongue there are wide-ranging regional differences in terms not only of accent but also of vocabulary. In the British Isles the verb 'to throw' is rendered variously according to dialect; variants include heave, hain, hull, cop, yack, pelt, scop, swail (see *Survey of English Dialects*, H. Orton).

Fashion sometimes dictates how we speak. Recent years have seen the integration of words and phrases employed by Black communities, to the extent that words such as *bad* (meaning good), *kickin'*, *safe* or *wicked* (as terms of approval) are freely used by young white people. Many of these terms owe much to the influence on street-talk of Black American expressions which have been popularized through jazz and dance music of the post-war years.

Jargon from different quarters is widely and rapidly disseminated in an age of frenzied media activity. New words are coined continuously and buzz-words abound. For example, -isms proliferate in contemporary socio-political parlance — racism, sexism, ageism, Thatcherism — the suffix is infinitely adaptable, having been liberated from traditional duties of expressing systems of thought or established practices, such as Marxism, nepotism, pluralism.

There has been an increase, too, in the flexibility of language, so that users conjoin words to create new concepts. Examples of this are *user-friendly* (used of a machine etc. that is easy to use), *energy-efficiency* (meaning optimum use of energy resources), and *product-placement* (meaning the practice of prominently placing brand-names of products outside the formal setting of an advertisement).

Modern English speakers are also used to the transformation of nouns into verbs to gain a new dimension of meaning; for example, *foreground*, which in its verb-form means to highlight ideas which hitherto have been less obvious; or *fast-track*, meaning to speed up the process of production of a commodity.

What is obvious to modern English speakers is that the language they speak is in a permanent state of change, adding and adapting to the needs of the inhabitants of the contemporary world. And so, the person who wishes to write competent and flexible English has to grasp the essential structure and movement of the language. Attempting to understand the flux in which any living language exists helps people adapt to future linguistic developments and develop their skills in spoken and written English.

A solid grounding in the basic structures of the language is a necessary springboard for anyone aspiring to stylistic flights of fancy. By setting out the rules of English in this volume, the editors mean in no way to restrict or cramp the reader's use of the language. Pedants often forget that the primary purpose of language is self-expression. In most situations meaning is best conveyed in clear, concise and well-structured phrases. A knowledge and application of the rules of grammar is the best guarantee of achieving effective expression of one's ideas.

It is possible for the rules to be broken; but to be broken creatively and with effect, they must first be mastered.

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Part One: Grammar

Parts of speech

1. THE NOUN

A noun is the name of a person or a thing. The words italicized in the passage below are nouns.

It was perhaps a *year* after he moved in with *Ben*, that *Will* awoke in the *night* in a *flurry* of excitement. He got up immediately and went to the *word processor* in his *room*, where he typed in the next *paragraph* of his prize-winning *novel* of love and despair.

We must remember that the term 'a thing' that we use in the definition of a noun includes

a place: Albert Dock, Basra, Glasgow, Mozambique

a quality: truth, happiness, misery

an action: murder, dealing, experience

(a) Classification of nouns

It is not generally necessary to classify nouns, but for the purpose of reference it can be helpful to distinguish the following kinds.

A *common noun* is the name of each thing of a class of things of the same kind.

A *proper noun* is the name of a particular thing, distinguishing it from others of its class.

Thus, *man*, *horse*, *sword*, *computer* are common nouns; but *John*, *Dobbin*, *Excalibur*, *AppleMac* are proper nouns.

Common nouns are of three kinds: concrete nouns, collective nouns, abstract nouns.

A *concrete noun* is the name of something that we can see, hear, touch, smell or taste.

A *collective noun* is the name of a collection of persons or things – band, crowd, host, flock, flotilla, conference, Cabinet.

An *abstract noun* is the name of a quality, state or action – goodness, childhood, maturity, greatness, poverty, flight. If an apple is good, we say that it possesses the quality of goodness. We may abstract this quality, i.e. consider it apart from the thing that possesses it. An abstract noun is thus the name of a mental or philosophical conception.

(b) Nouns and number

A noun or pronoun is said to be in the singular number when it denotes one person or thing. It is said to be in the plural number when it denotes more than one person or thing:

singular: man, woman, child, pen, bus

plural: men, women, children, pens, buses

Nouns form their plurals in several different ways.

(i) By adding *-en* to the singular:

ox, oxen

child, children

brother, brethren

(ii) By a change of vowel:

mouse, mice
goose, geese
tooth, teeth
louse, lice

(iii) Without change:

sheep, sheep
swine, swine

Many such plurals are names of animals, as with: a shoal of cod/trout/salmon etc.
Others need not change, but are not specifically animal-related:

aircraft, aircraft
counsel (meaning barrister), counsel
quid, quid

(iv) By adding -s or -es:

boy, boys	ass, asses
leg, legs	batch, batches
bus, buses	pass, passes
craze, crazes	fax, faxes

(v) By changing -y to -ies after a consonant:

fly, flies
lady, ladies

(vi) By adding -s to -y after a vowel:

trolley, trolleys

Note that *money*, *monies* is an exception to this rule.

(vii) By changing -f(e) to -ves:

calf, calves
knife, knives
shelf, shelves
wife, wives

Note that some nouns retain -fs rather than -ves:

roof, roofs
belief, beliefs
cliff, cliffs
proof, proofs

And some can take either ending:

dwarf, dwarfs or dwarves
wharf, wharfs or wharves

(viii) Plurals of words borrowed from other languages

Words borrowed directly from other languages retain their original plurals.

(1) Plurals in -a. Latin words with the singular ending -um and Greek words with the singular ending -on change to -a:

addendum, addenda
bacterium, bacteria
ovum, ova
criterion, criteria
phenomenon, phenomena

But some commonly-used words need not revert to their original plural form:

museum, museums
stadium, stadia or stadiums

(2) Plurals in -ae. Latin words ending in -a take -ae:

antenna, antennae (insects), antennas (radios)
larva, larvae
vertebra, vertebrae

But *drama*, *dramas* (a Greek word).

(3) Plural in -i. Italian words ending in -o take an -i ending:

virtuoso, virtuosi

Some commonly-used words, such as names of pasta shapes, are always in the plural:

spaghetti, fusilli, ravioli

Latin words ending in -us often take -i in their plural form:

alumnus, alumni
cactus, cacti
stimulus, stimuli
nucleus, nuclei

Some commonly-used Latin words ending in -us take a normal -es ending:

campus, campuses
chorus, choruses
virus, viruses
genius, geniuses (meaning clever person) or genii (meaning familiar spirit)

(4) Plurals of words ending in -ex or -ix. Latin words ending in -ex or -ix may change to -ices:

index, indices (when relating to mathematical terms) or indexes (when relating to books)
matrix, matrices
vortex, vortices

(5) Plurals of words ending in -is. Latin or Greek nouns ending in -is take -es endings:

analysis, analyses
axis, axes
hypothesis, hypotheses
parenthesis, parentheses

(6) Plurals in -im: Hebrew nouns may take the plural ending -im:

cherub, cherubim (meaning angelic spirit) or cherubs (meaning beautiful child)
kibbutz, kibbutzim

(7) Plurals in -aux. French plurals ending in -au take -x:

beau, beaux
château, châteaux

(ix) Plurals of compounds

Compound nouns form their plural by adding -s to the chief word. This is normal when the second element is a noun.

Girl Guides
football hooligans
boy friends
club-goers

Note the pattern where the compound is made up of a prepositional phrase: only the chief noun (not necessarily the last word) takes the plural form:

commanders-in-chief
fathers-in-law
hangers-on
men-o'-war
passers-by

Some hyphenated expressions ending with a noun put that noun into the plural even when it is not the main word:

will-o'-the-wisps

Jack-in-the-boxes

(c) Cases and the noun

A noun or pronoun is said to be in a certain case according to its relationship to other words in the sentence. Thus in the sentence

I gave the book to John.

I is in the nominative case because it is the subject; *book* is in the accusative case because it is the object. *John* is in the accusative case because it is governed by a preposition.

Explanations of the cases are below.

(i) The nominative case

The nominative is the case of the subject of a sentence or a clause.

John said so.

We know that *children* love play.

(ii) The vocative case

The vocative is used in addressing a person or thing.

Sir! Oy you!

Friends, Romans, Countrymen . . .

(iii) The accusative case

The accusative is the case of:

the object of a sentence or clause:

Cats like *milk*.

Tell me if you meet my *friend*.

a predicative noun referring to the object:

They elected her *president*.

Mike proved him a *liar*.

a noun used after a preposition:

I gave the book to *her*.

I will send the parcel to my *Dad*.

The shoppers passed through the cashiers' *tills*.

nouns used adverbially to indicate measurement of space or time:

I have walked ten *miles*. (Note that *miles* is not the object of the verb; *ten miles* indicates how far I have walked, not what I have walked.)

I waited an *hour* for you.

(iv) The genitive case

The genitive usually denotes the possessor or owner, and is used as an adjective-equivalent qualifying a following noun:

The *boy's* hat; the *boys'* soccer team.

The *bank's* computer print-out.

The genitive singular is formed by adding *'s* to the nominative:

girl's, lover's, student's

by adding a simple apostrophe to the nominative plural where that ends in *-s* or *-es*:
asses', students'

or by adding *-s* to the nominative plural if that form does not already end in *-s*:
men's, children's

Note that there are some exceptional cases. Greek and Hebrew words ending in *'-s'* take only an apostrophe for the genitive singular:

Moses' law, *Socrates'* speech

Note also the set phrases *for conscience's sake*, *for goodness' sake*.

The full genitive form should be used, however, in such expressions as *Dickens's* novels, *Keats's* Odes, in order to make it clear in pronunciation that we are not speaking of the novels of Dicken or the odes of Keat.

The of construction. Besides the inflected form of the genitive described above, we may use a phrase beginning with the preposition *of*:

David's son, the son of David.

However, it is important to note that although the phrase 'of David' is equivalent to the genitive, 'David' is in the accusative case governed by the preposition *of*.

(v) The dative case

This is the case of the indirect object.

Thus in the sentence, 'I sent *Jones* a fax,' the word *fax* names the thing directly affected by the action of sending, whereas *Jones* names the person indirectly affected by the action. *Fax* is the direct object (accusative case), and *Jones* is the indirect object (dative case). Other examples are:

I gave *Abdul* a call.

John gave the *beggar* a few coppers.

Show your *friend* the picture.

The chemist made the *woman* up some medicine.

(d) Gender

Nouns and pronouns in English, unlike those in many foreign languages (French and Spanish for instance), are not classified into groups of masculine and feminine. However, grammatical gender is evident in the way some nouns can be modified to take account of sex:

man, woman

lion, lioness

bull, heifer

police officer, woman police officer

(e) A note on apposition

A noun, or noun-equivalent, is said to be in apposition to another when it gives fuller definition to the meaning of that other noun or noun-equivalent. Both nouns or noun-equivalents name the same person or thing:

Nicholas, *Tsar of all the Russias*, was overthrown by Lenin. ('Tsar' is in apposition to 'Nicholas'.)

My client, *Mr Smith*, has instructed me to write to you, *the occupant* of the premises. ('Mr Smith' is in apposition to 'my client'. 'The occupant' is in apposition to 'you'.)

A noun-clause may be in apposition to a noun or pronoun:

He gave orders *that all protesters should be arrested*.

The subordinate clause here defines what is meant by *orders*; in effect, it does the work of an adjective qualifying *orders*. It should be understood that the word *that* is not acting as a relative pronoun, but as a subordinating conjunction.

2. THE VERB

A verb is a word that indicates being or doing on the part of the person or thing denoted by the subject of the sentence or clause. Every sentence or clause must contain a verb (expressed or understood) as part of the predicate.

Most verbs denote an action:

She *took* a taxi home.

Most *people like* dogs.

The sun *rises* in the east.