

# Language Change

Languages do not just happen – they are the result of many hundreds and even thousands of years of development. The English that we know is relatively new and is in a constant state of change. Every day hundreds of new words enter the language and many are dropped. In addition, the language is spoken in many dialects around the world.

The English language contains about 300,000 words but your vocabulary is about 3000 and you get by on a daily basis with about 150. By contrast, William Shakespeare had a vocabulary of 15,000 words and invented many of the words and phrases that we still use today.

**Old English** – The following common passage is from the time of King Alfred or about 800 AD.

Faeder ure thu the eart on heofonum, si thin nama gehalgod. Tobecume thin rice. Gewurthe thin willa on eorþan swa on heofonum.

**Middle English** – The same phrase is written as it would have appeared at the time of Geoffrey Chaucer (1320-1384)

Oure faidr that art in heuenes, halwid be thi name; thi kingdom cumme to; be thi wille don as in heuen and in erthe; gif to us this day ouer substaunce; and forgeue uo us oure dettis as we forgeue to oure detours...

**Modern English** – Here is the same passage as it appeared in 1611 or about the time of Shakespeare. Modern English begins to appear at about this time.

Our Father, which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. They will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation...

Our present language is roughly half Germanic and half Romance (Latin and French)

What do the following words mean? This should give you an understanding of how our language continues to evolve with new words entering and other words leaving. If you were to go back or forward in time, could you speak to anyone?

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|-----------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Sound off    | 10. unisex              | 18. groovy      |
| 2. on the make  | 11. mini-me             | 19. Whodunit    |
| 3. stool pigeon | 12. pass the buck       | 20. muggle      |
| 4. tizzy        | 13. gag me with a spoon | 21. hoody       |
| 5. wing nut     | 14. cool                | 22. celebutante |
| 6. grodey       | 15. smooch              | 23. supersize   |
| 7. on the loose | 16. to root for         | 24. drama queen |
| 8. mooch        | 17. chill               | 25. emoticon    |
| 9. biofeedback  |                         |                 |