



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF USING CLASSICAL BORROWINGS IN TEACHING AND  
LEARNING ENGLISH

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**Annotation:** *the theme of classical borrowings in the English language refers to the process by which English has adopted words, phrases, and concepts from ancient Greek and Latin. This borrowing has occurred throughout the history of the English language, particularly during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods when there was a renewed interest in classical literature and philosophy. Classical borrowings have enriched the English vocabulary and have contributed to the language's complexity and richness. Examples of classical borrowings include words like "democracy" (from Greek "dēmokratia"), "philosophy" (from Greek "philosophia"), and "et cetera" (from Latin "et cetera"). Understanding classical borrowings in English provides insight into the historical and cultural influences on the language and its evolution over time.*

**Key Words:** *Enlightenment periods, borrowings, classical languages, loan words, Greek component parts, native words, Greek prefixes, the Latin and French prefixes.*

The Latin language continued to be used in England all through the OE and ME periods in religious rituals, in legal documents, and in texts of a scientific and philosophical character. After the Norman Conquest it was partly replaced by official Anglo-Norman. The main spheres of the Latin language were the Church, the law courts and academic activities. Latin words were borrowed in all historical periods. In ME they were certainly less numerous than borrowings from French; their proportion was high only in religious texts translated from Latin. John Wyclif (late 14th c), one of the most prolific borrowers from classical languages, introduced about a thousand Latin words in his translation of the Bible.

The extraordinary surge of interest in the classics in the age of the Renaissance opened the gates to a new wave of borrowings from Latin and — to a lesser extent — from Greek (some Greek borrowings were adopted from Latin in a Latinised form, others came directly from Greek). In the 16th and 17th c. Latin was the main language of philosophy and science, its use in the sphere of religion became more restricted after the Reformation and the publication of the English versions of the Bible.



Many classical borrowings came into Early NE through French due to continuous contacts with France, for the French language had adopted many loan words from classical languages at the time of the Renaissance. Sometimes the immediate source of the loan-word cannot be determined. Thus the words *solid*, *position*, *consolation*, and many others, judging by their form, could be adopted either directly from Latin or from French, having entered the French language some time before; such borrowings are often referred to as "Franco-Latin". They should not be confused with loan-words from O Fr, which usually go back to Latin roots, for French is one of the descendants of Latin; words borrowed from O Fr differ from their Latin prototypes as they have been subjected to many changes in French.

Some loan-words from O Fr were re-shaped by the erudites of the age of Renaissance according to their Latin prototypes though their forms were historically correct, since they were adopted from O Fr. This Latinisation in the 15<sup>th</sup>—16<sup>th</sup> c. produced words like *describe* in place of Chaucer's *decrive(n)*, *equal* instead of *egal*, *language* instead of *langage*, *debt*, *doubt* and *adventure* instead of the earlier *dette*, *doute*, *aventure*. Some corrections even affected the pronunciation: *language*, *adventure*.

Adoption of classical words may have been facilitated by the large number of French loan-words in the English language of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> c. This is how O. Jespersen accounts for extensive borrowing of Latin words:

"The great historical event, without which this influence would never have assumed such gigantic dimensions was the revival of learning. Through Italy and France the Renaissance came to be felt in England as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> c, and since then the invasion of classical terms has never stopped, although the multitude of new words introduced was greater, perhaps, in the 14<sup>th</sup>, the 16<sup>th</sup>, the 19<sup>th</sup> than in the intervening centuries. The same influence is conspicuous in all European languages, but in English it has been stronger than in any other language, French perhaps excepted. This fact cannot, I think, be principally due to any greater zeal for classical learning on the part of the English than of other nations. The reason seems rather to be that the natural power of resistance possessed by a Germanic tongue against these alien intruders had been already broken in the case of the English language by the wholesale importation of French words. They paved the way for the Latin words which resembled them in so many respects, and they had already created in English minds that predilection for foreign words which made them shrink from consciously coining new words out of the native material.

Borrowings which were adopted in their original form (and meaning) or with slight adaptation, such as the dropping or change of the ending largely date from the 16<sup>th</sup> c. They mostly indicate abstract concepts and belong to the vocabulary of educated people or even erudites.

In some cases it has been possible to specify the date of the borrowings and the authors who used them initially. Numerous Latin and Greek words were first used by Thomas More (early 16<sup>th</sup> c), who wrote in Latin and in English; among his innovations were *anticipate*, *contradictory*, *exact*, *exaggerate*, *explain*, *fact*, *monopoly*, *necessitate*, *pretext*. Many classical borrowings first appeared in Shakespeare's works: *accommodation*, *apostrophe*, *dislocate*, *misanthrope*, *reliance*, *submerge*. Some borrowings have a more

specialised meaning and belong to scientific terminology (for the most part, they go back to Greek prototypes and may have been taken either from Greek or from Latin and French in a Latinised form), e.g. acid, analysis, antenna, apparatus, appendix, atom, axis, complex, curriculum, diagnosis, energy, formula, fungus, inertia, maximum, minimum, nucleus, radius, species, terminus, ultimum. A distinct semantic group of Greek loan-words pertains to theatre, literature and rhetoric: anapaest, comedy, climax, critic, dialogue, drama, elegy, epilogue, episode, metaphor, prologue, rhythm, scene, theatre. Like all borrowings, classical loan-words could undergo a shift of meaning upon entering the English language or some time later. Thus the original meaning of L *musculus* (NE muscle) was 'little mouse', cosmetic came from Greek *kosmos* 'universe', 'order' (hence 'adornment' and was also adopted in the original meaning (NE *cosmos*); atom meant something indivisible and changed its meaning due to the new discoveries in physics; climax meant a 'ladder' in Greek.

In addition to true borrowings, classical languages have provided a supply of roots in the creation of new words. Words like protestant, inertia, are based on classical roots but were created in modern times. Thomas Elyot (16th c.) introduced the Greek word democracy, first used the word education in the modern sense, and created the word encyclopaedia from Greek component parts.

Words of this type were not necessarily created in England; they could be borrowed from contemporary languages but, nevertheless, they constitute part of the classical element in the English vocabulary.

Nowadays they form the basis of international terminology, which is the chief element that modern languages hold in common.

The vast body of international terms continued to grow in the 18th— 19th c. A new impetus for their creation was given by the great technical progress of the 20th c, which is reflected in hundreds of newly coined terms or Latin and Greek words applied in new meanings, e.g. allergy, antibiotic, cyclotron, hormones, orthopaedic, protein, stratosphere — all based on Greek roots; examples of new application of Latin terms are — facsimile, introvert, quantum, radioactive, relativity; some terms are Greco-Latin hybrids, as they combine Latin and Greek roots: socio-logy, tele-vision (Cf. the use of tele in numerous compounds denoting instruments or branches of science concerned with transmitting information at a distance: telegraph, telephone, telepathy, telescope, telegramme.)

In addition to words and roots, Latin and Greek have supplied English (as well as other modern languages) with a profusion of derivational affixes which have become productive in the English language of the recent centuries. These suffixes can be seen in the following classical loan-words: humanism (-ism from the Gr *-ismos*, L *-ismus*); protagonist (from the Gr *-istes*, L *-ista*); fraternize (from the Gr *-izein*, L *-izare*). The Greek prefixes anti-, di-, neo-, the Latin (and French) prefixes de-, ex-, re- and others occur in numerous modern words combined with other components of diverse origin.

One of the effects of the classical borrowings on the English language was the further increase of the number of synonyms. Replacement of native words by classical loan-words is of rare occurrence; a normal result of the adoption of Latin words (in case they were not innovations proper) was an addition of another synonym to the existing set. The following



examples illustrate three sources of synonyms (or near-synonyms) and their semantic and stylistic differences:

Native English	French	Latin
break	sever	separate
reckon	count	compute
size	calibre	magnitude
kingly	royal	regal

It is evident that Latin and French words are more bookish than native, Latin words being sometimes more “elevated” than French ones.

Some French and Latin loan-words in the English vocabulary go back to one and the same Latin root, i.e. they are etymological doublets. They differ in sound, form and in meaning, as the borrowings from O Fr have undergone many changes both in the history of the French language since the days of the Latin parent-language and in the history of English after their adoption. The borrowings coming directly from Latin have suffered relatively few changes. In the list above, the pairs *sever* — *separate* and *royal* — *regal* are etymological doublets. Other examples are: *sure* — *secure* (from O Fr *seure* and L *securum*); *defeat* — *defect* (from O Fr *defait* and L *defectum*); *pursue* — *prosecute* (from O Fr *persuir* and L *prosecutum*); *vowel* — *vocal* (from O Fr *vouel* and L *vocal em*).

Early NE borrowings from classical languages have been assimilated by the language: they do not contain any foreign, un-English, sounds and receive primary and secondary stresses like other English words; the grammatical forms of borrowed words are usually built in accordance with the regular rules of English grammar. (Except for some recent borrowings which have preserved their forms: *datum* — *data*, *antenna* — *antennae*, etc.) And nevertheless they are easier to identify than the earlier layers of borrowings because they were borrowed a relatively short time ago and have been subjected to very few changes.

In order to identify Latin loan-words of the Early NE period we should note some endings and suffixes which occur in Latin borrowings but are not used for word creation in English. Some verbs were derived from Latin Past Part, of verbs belonging to different conjugations: verbs in *-ate* go back to the 1st Latin conjugation with the Part, in *-atum*, e.g. *dominate*, *locale*, *separate*; verbs in *-ute* come from Past Part, in *-utum*, e.g. *execute*, *prosecute*, verbs in *-ct-* - from Past Part, in *-ctum* (both Part. endings are found in the third conjugation), e.g. *correct*, *inspect*. Verbs derived from Latin infinitives have miscellaneous endings, which cannot serve as reliable criteria for identification, e.g. *admit*, *compell*, *induce*.

More informative are the elements *-ent*, *-ant* in adjectives. They come from respective suffixes of Pres. Part., e.g.: *apparent*, *evident*, *important*, *reluctant*. The same suffixes may occur in nouns: *incident*, *accident*.

Some of the Greek loan-words retain peculiarities of spelling which can facilitate identification: *ph* for [f], *ps* for [s], *ch* for [k], e.g.: *photography*, *psychology*, *scheme*, *archaic*. In addition to these formal marks, one should bear in mind the stylistic and

semantic character of classical borrowings: the bulk of these words belong to the bookish varieties of the language, to scientific prose and to special terminology. Hundreds of words of Latin and Greek origin (no matter whether they are borrowings proper or later formations) have parallels in many modern languages — French, German, Ukrainian and others — as they enter the layer of international words. Therefore the existence of Russian parallels (as well as the knowledge of the most frequent international Greek and Latin word components used therein) may prove helpful in identifying words of classical origin, e.g. -logy, -graphy (Gr).

In conclusion, as is known, Latin continued to be used in England all through the OE and ME periods in religious rituals, in legal documents and in texts of scientific and philosophical character. After the Norman Conquest it was partially replaced by official Anglo-Norman but still its main spheres remained the Church, the law courts and academic activities. The period of the Renaissance saw a new influx of Latin borrowings (including Greek loan words). In the 16th and 17th centuries Latin was the main language of philosophy and science, its use in the sphere of religion was more restricted after the Reformation and the publication of the English versions of the Bible.

Many classical borrowings came into Early NE through French due to continuous contacts with France, for the French language had adopted many loan-words from classical languages at the time of the Renaissance. One of the reasons for the influx of Latin words during this period was that many of the new ideas encountered in classical works were not susceptible to precise translation – therefore scholars preferred to retain the Latin terms.

A distinction should be made between genuine Latin and Greek words, which were used in ancient times with the same or roughly the same meaning, and those which were based on Latin and Greek roots but were made as new terms in modern times. These borrowings which were adopted in their original form and meaning or with slight adaptation (dropping or change of the ending) large date from the 16th century. They mostly indicate abstract concepts and belong to the vocabulary of educated people and even erudites.

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