

French Influence

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The Norman conquest of 1066 had a tremendous impact not only on the social and political life of England but also on the literary and linguistic development of the nation. In fact, the conquest of England in 1066 by William, the Duke of Normandy, was destined to exert a profound influence on the English language and seemed to affect considerably the whole course of the language. The English language, with the scraps of loan words from Celtic, Latin, Greek and Scandinavian languages, remained more or less original till the Norman conquest. But the French influence that the conquest had brought in, caused a great stir and changed the character of the language with diverse and numerous loans from French.

The Normans settled in England, after their conquest, and became the masters of the country in every sphere Political, Social, Literary or Linguistic. Their domination was absolute in every sphere, including the English language. Though the Normans settled in England, they still retained contact with France, and that led to the French influence on the Political as well as cultural life of the English or British. Infact, it was the Normans who brought upon England a far reaching influence of French words and culture. It was after the conquest and under the French linguistic influence that the Middle English period in the native language started in 1150.

The Normans were the rulers of the realm. So, they enjoyed greater eminence in cultural and literary affairs. The French loan words entered almost into every walk of life. The following account would sufficiently bear out how the French language had tremendous influence on England and brought about a drastic linguistic enlargement.

- a) Political words : There were numerous French words relating to government and administration. Excepting the words 'king' and 'queen', the Normans introduced almost all governmental and Political terns from French as crown, State, Minister, power, Parliament, People, Nation act.

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- b) Military Words : The Normans were the proud victors and took into their hands the absolute management of military matters. A host of French military words came into existence such as war, peace, captain, colonel, soldier, enemy and so on.
- c) Social relationship : The Normans were the masters and in their daily relations with the subordinate English, they had the French terms that naturally had an easy access to this English language, as for instance – sir, madam, master, mistress, rich, power, money, cash etc.

In fact, it has been observed that due to different reasons the French terms had entered into English language in the fields like judicial and legal matters, ethical life, family relationship and even in food and regular habit on daily life.

- Judicial – Justice, Judge, Court, Summon, Penalty fee, estate etc.
- Ecclesiastical – Religion, Savior, saint clergy, Sacrifice etc.
- Ethical – Virtue, Vice, Conscience, Chaste etc.
- Family – Uncle, Aunt, Niece, Cousin etc.
- Food and daily life – Beef, Pork, Dinner, Supper etc.

The French influence on the English language brought about an immensely rich linguistic development by helping the formation of new words, i.e. the ‘hybrids’ as they are called nowadays.

The Norman Conquest of 1066 brought about tremendous linguistic changes as well as developments in the English language. In fact, the importation, as a result of the conquest, was prolific. There was perhaps, no sphere of activity, where the borrowing of French words was not made.