

John Dickson (Studio)

That's the 1970s British sitcom 'Mind Your Language', a comedy about a classroom full of students from different nationalities, all learning English as a second language.

It's politically incorrect, but it makes the point that English can sound very different depending on where you come from.

English is spoken as a *first* language by about half a billion people around the world.

If you add those who speak English as a second (or third language), we're talking about 2 billion people.

But are they all speaking the same thing?

What used to be called 'The King's English'?

More than half of the world's native English speakers are now in the US

Maybe it should be called 'The President's English'?

Linguists agree that from country to country ... ethnicity to ethnicity ... people group to people group, there are wide variations in English **pronunciation**, spelling, vocabulary, and grammar.

Director Mark wants me to add that you can't even work at Undeceptions unless you are committed to the grammatical finesse known as 'The Oxford comma'.

But I digress.

English has been in use for 15-hundreded years. It's changed so dramatically over that time that the original English (basically Anglo-Saxon) is almost unrecognizable to modern English speakers.

And scores of 'Englishes' have developed across the planet - each with its own claim to validity.

This has led to what are called 'creoles' - like Singlish, Chinglish, Denglish, Anglikaans and other interlanguages whose status is hotly debated by academics the world over.

It seems that English - for all its caricature as the stuffy royal speech - has always been on the move. From the beginning it has constantly adapted, adopted, and intermingled - and that's before we think about the way the internet and text-messaging has changed it. LOL!!!.

English might just be the world's ultimate *mongrel* language ...

... which may be why it's arguably the language that's done most to spread Christianity around the world. Christianity, like English, is a highly flexible, culturally adaptive system. Thus the history of English and the history of Christianity are, in a sense, intertwined.

I'm John Dickson and this is the English version of Undeceptions.

This season of Undeceptions is sponsored by our friends at Zondervan Academic. You can get discounts on their special MasterLectures video courses and free chapters of many of the books we talk about here on the pod by going to zondervanacademic.com/undeceptions.

John Dickson: Okay, yep. So, um, tell me what you had for breakfast or lunch or something just so I can see the level here.

Simon Horobin: I had, uh, we had a British lunch today, which was toad in the hole, roasted gravy.

John Dickson: At high At high table?

Simon Horobin: Yeah, Tuesday's international day, but today we went British.

John Dickson (Studio)

I'm setting recording levels - and getting an insight into the life of an Oxford don - with one of the world's foremost experts on the English language.

Simon Horobin is Professor of English Language & Literature at the University of Oxford, and a Tutorial Fellow at Magdalen College.

He's the author of 'The English Language: A Very Short Introduction', and 'How English Became English: A Short History of a Global Language', both by Oxford University Press.

There aren't many other people in the world who can say they literally wrote the book on English!!

His other books include 'Chaucer's Language', 'Bagels, Bumf and Buses: A Day in the Life of the English Language' and, my personal favourite, 'Does Spelling Matter'.

The answer is yes, by the way. But Simon is way more nuanced than I am about such things.

John Dickson: so can you set the scene for us? Um, before there was English, what were people speaking and where did those people come from, given they're here in England?

Simon Horobin: Well, before the Anglo Saxon tribes arrived, and the language they spoke is the origin of what we call English, there were, of course, Romans speaking Latin, and there were Celts speaking a Celtic language. But what we think of as English, then, is the result of a group of Germanic tribes coming to Britain in the 5th century, bringing with them the Celtic language. Germanic dialects that they were already speaking. in, um, on the continent. Um, and it's the kind of interaction between those different, uh, but related dialects that is the result of what we call English, which is, which goes back to, um, the word for angles, the Anglo Saxons, Anglish, English, and it relates to a bit of, um, Northern Germany from which they originated.

John Dickson: And did they come, um, I know there's loads of debate about why they came and how they came. Was it, was it an invasion? Was it migration? But did they basically come because they saw the Roman Empire basically broke down here? So there's an opportunity?

Simon Horobin: That's right. Yeah. And so they came and then they settled because, you know, the, the, the Romans had, had left. And they sort of saw a kind of power vacuum and an opportunity to settle. Um, and, and they, these different tribes settled in different parts of the country. And, um, And it's partly that that gives rise to the, the, the dialect variation that we find even back in, in the earliest form of English.

John Dickson: Perhaps a more basic question, and maybe this can't be answered. How on earth do languages develop and, in a sense, overtake their linguistic forebears?

Simon Horobin: Well, I guess the thing to remember is that it's speakers that, that, that are important in that story rather than the languages themselves. And so it's partly to do with the fortunes of the speakers.

So, so what happens is that, is that the speakers of those languages spread, they migrate, like the Anglo Saxons did to come to Britain. Um, and they move away from their areas of origin. And if they flourish, uh, if they, you know, um, put down roots and, and thrive, um, or perhaps conquer other groups so, such that their language is then, uh, taken over by those others in the same way that, for instance, Latin had been at an earlier stage. Then, you know, the language spreads, and, and if in fact what they do is, is that they die out, then the language dies out.

John Dickson (Studio)

Roughly speaking, the history of the English language is a three-act play.

And the first act starts in the 600s and extends through to the 1000s. This is the period when friend of the pod the Venerable Bede writes his History of the English People (though he writes it in Latin). It's when the earliest work of English was written, Beowulf, an epic poem written in the style of a Germanic heroic legend and running over 3000 lines. This is the era of Old English.

Simon Horobin: Sure. So, Old English is the period from about 650 to around, um, 1100. And that's the earliest recorded form of English as we think of it. Um, and, um, so the earliest written records of English begin around that time.

John Dickson: Is there such a thing as the first recorded English sentence, or document?

Simon Horobin: The, probably the earliest recorded English word is, um, is *reihan*, which is scratched in runes on a bone. Um, it's, it's a runic inscription, which is worth remembering, but the earliest recorded forms of Germanic were in the runic alphabet, not in the Roman alphabet. Um, and, um, it's a very ancient form of the word, which in Old English is *ra*, And in modern English it's a *roe*, as in a *roe deer*. And the bone that it's on is a bit of a, uh, of a skeleton of a *roe deer*.

So somebody has found this and thought, that's a bit of *roe deer*, I'll write on it the word *Raihan*. Um, unfortunately those early inscriptions, they look fantastic, but they're not particularly imaginative. You know, they tend to be just a description of what the thing is. Um, or who it belongs to, or who carved the runes. But that's, that's really interesting because it's so, it is such a, uh, an archaic form of the word that seems to point right back to, um, Proto Germanic.

John Dickson: Yeah. Okay. I think it's time to hear a passage in Old English. And, um, I actually, you know, I'd like you to read the passage that I spotted on page two of your Oxford Very Short Introduction to the English Language. I just want to hear how it sounds. I'm sure my listeners would love to hear how it sounds.

Simon Horobin: Sure. Okay. On Fara on force, his NDA on his sen. Thus reaches to his tuna that he held will know Ton and him father on itch her on hunger for it on. za The Lord is with us, and before you. Now I come to tell you that I am your son. I am the son of your king. And he arose came to his father. And when he came there, he was far from his father. He himself had come with a great messenger, a stewardess. I Lord, for your forgiveness, and for your I Father, for the blessings of the Lord. May our repentance be so great that you will continue to bless us.

John Dickson: I'm going to let listeners just hang with that and wonder what on earth it is. I think there are a couple of words people will go, Oh, I think I know what that might be. And, uh, we'll come back to it in a, in a, in a version that they might understand.

John Dickson (Studio)

Hint: it's not Beowulf.

But you've got to know about Beowulf.

As I said earlier, Beowulf is the classic work of Old English.

It's a rollicking tale of a warrior hero (named Beowulf) who helps the king of the Danes, Hrothgar, defeat a terrorizing monster called Grendel. Beowulf kills him by ripping his arm off. Grendel's monster mum is horrified and pledges revenge ... but Beowulf kills her, too. He finds an ancient giant's sword in her underwater cave and decapitates her.

Beowulf is then elevated to become king of his own kingdom and lives happily ever after ... Well, sort of. He reigns successfully for decades, but then has to do battle with a dragon. He kills the dragon with a dagger but not before the dragon bites him and poisons him to death.

The final part of the poem describes Beowulf's great funeral and elaborate burial mound.

Here's a snippet in modern English translation.

Read by who else but Yannick Lawry ...

READING

THEN from the moorland, by misty crags,
with God's wrath laden, Grendel came.

The monster was minded of mankind now
sundry to seize in the stately house.
Under welkin he walked, till the wine-palace there,
gold-hall of men, he gladly discerned,
flashing with fretwork. Not first time, this,
that he the home of Hrothgar sought, —
yet ne'er in his life-day, late or early,
such hardy heroes, such hall-thanes, found!
To the house the warrior walked apace,
parted from peace; the portal opened,
though with forged bolts fast, when his fists had struck it,
and baleful he burst in his blatant rage,
the house's mouth. All hastily, then,
o'er fair-paved floor the fiend trod on,
ireful he strode; there streamed from his eyes
fearful flashes, like flame to see.
He spied in hall the hero-band,
kin and clansmen clustered asleep,
hardy liegemen. Then laughed his heart;
for the monster was minded, ere morn should dawn,
savage, to sever the soul of each,
life from body, since lusty banquet
waited his will!

Simon Horobin: Beowulf, of course, is, um, I mean, it's, it's the sort of the greatest text that survives written in Old English. Um, we don't know who wrote it. We don't really know when it was written. Um, And it survives in a single manuscript, which, um, the date of which we don't really

You know, there's a lot that's unknown and disputed about the text. Um, and, um, but it's hugely important, I suppose, because it shows Old English in a very, um, at a very developed stage of its, as a, as a kind of poetic medium. So it's, it, this isn't just the language that was being spoken by

Anglo Saxons trying to go about their business, um, in, in pre conquest Britain, but it shows a language that, that had been, you know, in terms of things like, uh, um, the, the degree of poetic vocabulary that had been developed at that time. Um, and the, um, um, the way that the sort of metrical constraints have been developed. So we see the language being used in a very effective way.

John Dickson (Studio)

We'll put a link to the full text - in modern English - in the shownotes.

Act 2 is known as 'Middle English'.

If Act 1 was heavily influenced by the Germanic tradition, Acts 2 owes something to the French.

Simon Horobin: Um, I mean, sometimes you say that, you know, Old English stops at 1066 because no language sort of changes suddenly overnight. Um, so we say around about the year 1000. Um, why does the Norman Conquest have such an important impact on English? Well, it's partly to do with the fact that, um, that William of Normandy came over with, you know, many, much of his sort of entourage who were then settled in this country took over many of the positions of political power.

And so French speakers replaced English speakers. And so it became the language of government. It became the language of administration. It became the kind of the language of the elite. Old English continued to be used, but mostly by the sort of, um, peasant classes who were, um, illiterate, and therefore it was largely a spoken language, and, um, those

who were using English were often then deliberately, uh, drawing, um, words from French into English.

So a lot of the Old English, um, vocabulary simply gets replaced by the French equivalent at that point. So lots of, that's why Old English is often very hard to understand.

John Dickson: you give us a couple of words

Simon Horobin: are many

John Dickson: might illustrate, you know, the French influence over the,

Simon Horobin: um, So things like, we tend to think that words for, um, Uh, members of your family, you know, kinship terms in languages tend to be very stable.

And that's true in English, so that we have things like father, brother, mother, um, those are all from Old English, you can trace them right the way back. Um, but when you get to things like uncle and aunt and cousin, you know, which are slightly further removed from the, you know, the immediate nuclear family, those are French borrowings.

John Dickson: Is it also true that some of the now English words relating to fashion and food and art are French?

Simon Horobin: Exactly. Yeah, that comes a little bit later in the Middle English period. And it's only later in about the 14th century that we see another wave of French influence. And that is particularly to do with these areas of sort of French culture that were perceived as being highly prestigious. That's the period of, um, poets like Geoffrey Chaucer, for instance.

John Dickson (Studio)

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in 1343 (give or take) and died in 1400. He earned the reputation of being 'The father of English literature.'

He's best known for 'The Canterbury Tales', a collection of funny, sad, and odd stories told by pilgrims in a story-telling contest while on their pilgrimage to ... you guessed it ... Canterbury and the shrine of St Thomas Becket.

Chaucer intended to write over a hundred of these tales, but he only got to 24 before he died.

READING

Though I speak plainly of this matter here,
Explain to you their words and means of cheer;
Nor though I use their very terms, nor lie.
For this thing do you know as well as I:
When one repeats a tale told by a man,
He must report, as closely as he can,
Every single word, as he remembers it,
How vulgar it be, or how unfit;
Or else he may be telling what's untrue,
Embellishing, even making up things too.
He may not spare, although it were his brother;
He must as well say one word as another.
Christ spoke very plainly, in holy writ,
And, you know well, there's nothing rude in it.
And Plato says, to those able to read:
"The word should be the cousin to the deed."

The Canterbury Tales, Geoffrey Chaucer

Simon Horobin: There are lots of records relating to Chaucer's life. Not one of them actually refers to him as a poet. He was an administrator. He worked in the sort of, um, initially as a page boy, uh, and then as a clerk dealing with sort of, um, Making sure that the right amount of tax was paid on, on wool imports and exports. And then he was the, he was the clerk of the king's works. Um, so he worked in and around the royal court. And then, you know, in his spare time, he, he, he was a poet. Um, but what's significant about Chaucer is that at the time he's writing, Um, the, the sort of mid to late 14th century is the point just when English starts to become more of a significant language again. So French is starting to tail off. That period I mentioned of where French words are being drawn into English, it's just a point at which French as a language itself is starting to lose its status in English.

And that's partly to do with the fact that the French of England is seen as a rather provincial kind of dialect. Chaucer says of his Prioress, you know, she, she has kind of courtly aspirations and we're told that, um, she liked to speak French to sound posh, but she spoke the French of Stratford at the Bow, which is a place in Middlesex because the French of Paris, Paris, he says, was to her, un connaitre. She didn't know it. Um, and that's the sort of, you get a lot of those kinds of slightly sort of, um, you know, the, those put downs where you, you, you speak French, but it's terrible English French. And, um, Chaucer's, you know, as an administrator, he would have kept records in what was called Anglo Norman, which was this dialect that had grown up, the Norman dialect of French, which came over with William of Normandy, but that was used as a kind of administrative language. And the French that had become fashionable was the Parisian French. Um, so that English as a consequence starts to be more widely used, and we also get an emerging middle class.

There's huge social changes in 14th century England because of the Black Death, the Peasants Revolt, and a group that were completely

disenfranchised start to acquire more sort of political and social capital. And those are people who are monolingual English speakers. And you have a kind of appetite for literature in English. And that's really Chaucer's audience. So he's one of the first people to sort of recognize that writing in the vernacular has a potential. And, um, So, so yeah, he's important for, partly because he's somebody writing in English just at that point where it starts to take off again.

John Dickson: so does a work, a great work like Chaucer's, um, play a role in standardizing? A language like English or is it more that he's riding the wave? Um, so he's just a pristine example of the best middle English? Or do people you know, then want to speak like choa?

Simon Horobin: I think there's a bit of both. He gives it, he certainly, he's riding the wave in the sense that he's not responsible for the sort of, you know, English coming back in that way. But I think, but he does then create, you know, he, he, it gathers. Um, pace because he, because of who he is and what he does - the advent of the printing press, one of the first books that Caxton printed in English when he came to Westminster and set up his press in 1476 was the Canterbury Tales.

John Dickson (Studio)

William Caxton was a merchant in the 14-hundreds. He might have been the one to introduce the printing press in England.

He printed over a 100 different titles, including the first English translation of Aesop's Fables – those pithy ancient Greek moral tales like "The Tortoise and the Hare" and "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" that massively influenced later children's literature.

Putting things like Chaucer and Aesop in print meant moving toward a standardized English. Caxton adopted the London dialect - but through the

publication of these books, that dialect influenced other regions throughout England.

Hey presto - we're developing a unified English!

So, you know, I think it's part of that story as well. Um, and, you know, The printing press is another key factor in bringing about kind of standardizing, um, of the English language. And so Chaucer is kind of, and when, when Caxton is sort of, um, When he issues that, he uses Chaucer's name particularly about as how important he is as a kind of one of the first finders of the English language, somebody who, you know, who's sort of very instrumental in, in bringing it back and so on.

So he's, his name is definitely brought into that cause.

John Dickson: The other, um, sort of great text, um, is of course the Bible. Um, what is the earliest attempt to put it in English? Is it Tyndale or were there other attempts before William Tyndale?

Simon Horobin: Well, there was Old English, um, uh, versions of the Bible. Um, and then of course there is, um, Wycliffe in the 14th century. Um, so that there have been Old and Middle English versions, um, before Tyndale comes along. Um, and one of the features of Bible translation is that they quite often are borrowing from earlier translations. Um, and that's partly because if somebody's already done it, then it's worth having a look at what they did, I suppose. But it's also because, of course, there's a sort of, it's a feature of the language of the Bible generally, that it tends to be, um, somewhat archaic. Um, and so looking back to earlier versions is a way of maintaining that kind of the continuity but also giving it that kind of archaistic effect. So

John Dickson: would Tyndale's translation be regarded as early modern? Yeah. Okay.

Simon Horobin: Yeah.

John Dickson: But does it? Have a, have a role in standardizing English, or is the fact that he was such a controversial figure mean that it doesn't play that role? At all?

Simon Horobin: Well, I mean, it certainly leaves a mark on translations of the Bible and also, um, you know, many of the idioms. that he introduced, in fact, are ones that have survived, you know you know, things like some of those phrases that we associate particularly with the King James Bible, like pride goes before a fall or out of the mouths of babes or by the skin of one's teeth, there's nothing new under the sun, fly in the ointment, you know, they got those direct from Tyndale. So, hmm. So you could say, yeah, Tyndale, you know, he coined all those phrases and we still use them.

EDITORIAL 7

By the 14th century, the curtain was falling on the French influence that had shaped Middle English.

Thanks to Chaucer, and later Tyndale, the status of English starts to change. It's no longer just the language of the commoner and the downtrodden.

English began to be used in more technical and expressive contexts - and the stage was set for the third act of our drama - the rise of Early Modern English.

It's the language of John Donne and William Shakespeare ... stay with us.

BREAK 1

MEDIA - Shakespeare's Three Little Pigs

John Dickson (Studio)

That's comedian John Branyan with his Shakespearean take on The Three Little Pigs, in case the Early Modern English confused you.

He called it a Triune Tale of Diminutive Swine!!

It's great fun, and it comes complete with illustrations by Bret Hawkins. We'll put a link in the shownotes.

The third act of the English language - Early Modern English - stretched from 1500 to 1800.

The expansion of trade and travel during this period led to a vast number of new inclusions from languages like Italian (parmesan and balcony), Spanish (tobacco and banana), and Turkish (yogurt and sherbet), and even Hindi (like pajamas - truncated in Australian English as PJs or 'jarmies').

Then there's the influence of the European renaissance, which gave English a ton of classical Greek and Latin words that we now think of as English:

Democracy (Greek for "rule by the people"), Biology (Greek for "study of life"), Aqua (Latin for "water"), Maternal (Latin for "motherly")

Colourful contributions of phrases in this period came straight from William Shakespeare ... like 'wild goose chase' (from Romeo and Juliet), 'break the ice' (from The Taming of the Shrew) and 'in a pickle' (The Tempest).

One of the biggest milestones of the Early Modern English period was the King James version of the Bible - also known as the Authorised Version - because King James I 'authorized' this translation alone for public use!

The Times newspaper described this version of the Bible as 'a driving force in the shaping of the English-speaking world.'

The Authorised Version has contributed as many as 257 phrases to the English language - more than any other source, including Shakespeare - like 'thorn in the side', 'seeing eye to eye', 'the powers that be', 'drop in the bucket', 'labour of love', 'cast the first stone', 'skin of my teeth', and so on.

So I asked Simon about it ...

John Dickson: So let's talk about the AV, the authorised version. So it's the very beginning of the 17th century. Are we now in a period where people think there is a standard English? And so you get this very authoritative, Bible translation. I mean, indeed, it's called the Authorized Version. Uh, so has English reached its pristine form at that point?

Simon Horobin: Well, it's on the way, I would say. The 18th century is probably the period that's most associated with the standardization of the language, but that's partly because standardization takes a long time, and because the sort of final, um, um, um, point on that journey is codification and it's the 18th century where we start to get the emergence of grammar books and spelling books and Dictionaries Johnson Johnson's Dictionary 1755 being the sort of the major one and also, the 18th century is the period where people start to where those kinds of anxieties that you know about

correctness start to really bed in and um You know, I mentioned earlier the, the idea of an academy of English and, and we see people like Jonathan Swift and, um, Defoe and people coming up with the idea that there should be some sort of authoritative body that can legislate over what is acceptable and what's not. Just on the same

John Dickson: Did it survive this Academy?

Simon Horobin: never, it never took

John Dickson: but the French one did,

Simon Horobin: But the French did.

John Dickson: It still exists?

Simon Horobin: exists? Exactly. It still does now. Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

John Dickson (Studio)

We're referring to the Académie Française, the French Academy, the principal French council for matters relating to the French language.

It was established in 1635 during the reign of King Louis the 13th, and consists of 40 members - the 'immortals' - who are responsible for keeping the French language 'pure' and publishing the official French dictionary.

Some in England wanted the same thing. But 'pure' is the last word you'd use for the English language. I mean 'pure' itself comes from French ...

Simon Horobin: Partly, I think what happened is that, that, that, that it, it sort of, um, it fails partly because nobody could really decide, you know, who should sit in, you know, who should sit on such a body? What, how should it work? What are the, you know, the practicalities of it? How do you actually legislate? And partly because Dr. Johnson came along, you know, and, and Lord Chesterfield, who was, who sort of belatedly had kind of patronized the dictionary, said, you know, I'm, I'm so impressed by all of this. I hand over all authority in the English language to Dr. Johnson. You know, you've got this kind of one man authority in a sense. Um, so that, that, that doesn't really take off. So the 18th century though is the period of codification of the completion of that standardization process.

John Dickson (Studio)

Samuel Johnson's dictionary, or 'A Dictionary of the English Language', was published in two volumes in 1755, after eight years' work.

There had been dictionaries before, but Johnson's definitions were more sound and, importantly, it offered evidence of usage with quotations going back a century or more. It's a method that was inherited by the full Oxford English Dictionary in 20 volumes (which I have on my shelf) – it not only gives the definition; it provides the oldest example of the use of the word. Like the verb 'undeceive' goes back to Florio in 1598 where it meant "to clear, to free, to resolve from doubt". The noun 'Undeceptions' is first used in a 1694 book called Greek Morals - the quote given is "At present undeception is politick, it goes commonly betwixt two lights" - whatever that means ...

But yeah, certainly by the time of the early 17th century, we now see, um, uh, a much more kind of, um, standardized form of the language.

Printing is fully developed, but at the same time, as I said, biblical language tends to be rather archaic. The authorized version They deliberately set out to use what was best in the existing translations, so they were encouraged to look back. Um, and as a result, what you get in the AV is something that is really quite archaic, even for, um, the time that it was produced.

John Dickson: Okay. So I want, I want to hear the authorized version. And here, and here, here is the point where, uh, in the show we will reveal that, uh, that Old English that you read is this same passage you're about to read. But I wonder if you could, um, just read us the A. V. version. Um, maybe not the whole passage, but, um, give us a little bit of a Philological commentary. Use this passage to tell us about the history of English.

Simon Horobin: Yeah. Then he said, A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.

So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country.

The end. And he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger? I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

Make me like one of your hired servants. So what you can see here, I think, is for a start, quite a lot that is actually very similar to the Old English passage that we looked at. Um, even though, you know, they don't sound the same and they don't always look the same, many of the words are still

there. You know, um, the word man, Old English mon, sons, Old English sunna. Notice it's got a different ending on it. Because it belongs to a different declension, so they're different endings, like I was talking about. Um,

: Father, obviously. Spelt slightly differently, sounds slightly different, fada and fava. Um, and, um, the younger, the yingra, um, after fiawam dagam, dative plural, a few days.

But, you know, they're still obviously the same words. Um, the Old English passage has a number of letters in it. that don't appear in the authorised version. So we have things like the runic letter THORN rather than TH. So one of the problems that they encountered when, uh, the Anglo Saxons wanted to adopt the Latin alphabet to write all English is that it doesn't have necessarily the same numbers of letters because they didn't have the same sounds.

So if there's no th in Latin, it doesn't have any way of representing it. So what they simply did was borrow the thorn, which was one of the runes. Um, you know, so called because it looks like a thorn on a rosebush. And they used that. So we've got a number of different letters. There's different spelling.

Um, but the words are still the same. Um, sometimes the words are the same. In modern English, but they've changed their meaning, which can be, um, a bit tricky. So, uh, in the Old English, we've got, Fada seile mi, um, uh, Give me the portion of goods. Uh, that's, that's the verb, uh, Old English, selan, which survives as modern English, sel.

Um, And, um, in Old English it just meant to give. So it's quite a significant difference. Actually that change probably came up, came about through contact with Old Norse because they had a similar verb in Old Norse, but they used it to mean to, to exchange goods, you know, with money rather than to hand somebody something.

So you can imagine some kind of unpleasant encounters where somebody says, you know, sell me that horse and you think that they're going to give it to you and they think that you're going to buy it from them. Um, So some changes in meaning, even though the words have survived. But you can also see here a number of replacements of, of, of words so that there are, um, you know, things like the word prodigal, which of course we particularly associate with this passage, which is, um, a Latin borrowing.

: Um, and we've got, um, the, the word certain, which is again, another Latin word, um, a portion. Um, we've got a country from the French word.

John Dickson: I was about to ask, any French? Okay. So it's all there? Yeah, exactly.

Simon Horobin: You can see all of the, the, the sort of, in miniature, um, you know, some of that, uh, variety in English.

John Dickson (Studio)

Let's press pause. I've got a 5 min Jesus for you.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is one of the best known of Jesus' stories. It was told to two different audiences, as the introduction to the parable tells us: Luke 15:1-2. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3 Then Jesus told them this parable:

Sinners gathering / Pharisees muttering

Jesus explains himself with his parable

Just as 3 characters, Jesus has 3 points

1. Clarifies 'Sinner'

Clearly young son = 'sinners' Jesus has been befriending

As such, glimpse how Jesus defined sin

Many today define 'sin' as vices: drunk, swear, sex

Jesus less *convenient*, *more unsettle*

What does son do (v.11-13)? ¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

Demand share, leaves, spends self

Wanted father's goods " nothing father

'Sinners' are those who stake claim on God's good things " spend at distance ...

Want all creation has to offer " nothing to do with the Creator

This is why so-called 'good people' can still be 'sinners' in Jesus' eyes:

So, when son returns (18-20), we expect a story of anger ...

Sinners deserve judgement: Jesus clear

Not only unsettling definition 'sin', striking description of God

2. Describes God

Beautiful elements: ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him ...

Father runs, embraces, kisses ... before apology

Then, instead of restrictions, lavishes ... ²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! ... Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

This is Jesus’ description of God

At 1st sign of return accept | Not in business of depriving ...

God embracing forgiving celebrating parent—in business of forgive/forget

Jesus not finished.

Not content redefine ‘sinner’

redescribe ‘God’

Wants to expose ‘religion’ of opponents

3. exposes religion

Old son represents grumble Pharisees

If ever wondered what Jesus thought of religion: vv.28-29. “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

By confession (29) stance slave/master *not* son/father:

That's what 'religion' does " Locks you up with rules

Result: stunt grasp of father's mercy—

29 "...Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends...."

Stunted perspective: Father ... v.31 "My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

But that's what religion does!!

It's not what Jesus was about.

He was about inviting the wayward to experience forgiveness, love, celebration!

You can press play now.

BREAK 2

John Dickson: So English is like, from what you're saying, it's the, it's the Pac Man of languages. Do you remember the computer game, Pac Man?

It just gobbles up everything it comes into. Is that true of all languages or was there something about this place and this people or its history that just gobbled up words and became the great pac man of language?

Simon Horobin: Yeah, that's an interesting question. I mean, I think one of the things that, so it's, it's, it's the case that in Germanic languages generally don't really typically borrow many words from other languages. So if you think about modern German, it tends not to. Um, to, to rely on loan words, but rather to create new words from within its resources.

And, and that's, that's how Old English typically worked. Um, so what happened? Well, one thing is, of course, that, you know, The Norman Conquest happened, and we get lots of borrowing. But I think also another thing that, that changed dramatically was the structure of English, which is also to do with the Norman Conquest and the change from Old to Middle English.

But Old, Old English, like all Germanic languages, relies heavily on a system of inflectional endings to mark different cases. So that if, if something's the subject, it will have one ending. If it's the object, it'll have a different ending. And, um, it's exactly how modern German would still work today, and most other Germanic languages.

Whereas, um, obviously modern English doesn't have many of those left at all. We have the plural ending, uh, where you add an S or an ES. Um, and we have traces of the genitive case, the case of possession, in the way that we now add a plural. An apostrophe S, mm-hmm or S apostrophe, and those are kind of relics of a much richer system that goes back to Old English.

And the reason why that all broke down is again to do with the, um, the transition from Old to Middle English, the influx of the French and so on. Um, but as a result of that, it's much easier to borrow words. Because structurally, the language can just accommodate them, because they don't have to then be accommodated into a whole series of different case endings. And, and that, I think, is a big part of it, is that English just becomes more readily susceptible to borrowing because it's ditched all of this system of inflection...

John Dickson (Studio)

In some cases we have become so familiar with the borrowed words that we no longer notice them.

Entrepreneur from French; yacht from Dutch; pharaoh from Greek.

But the real headache begins when you try and spell these mongrel English words. Here's comedian Gallagher,

MEDIA - [Gallagher on spelling challenges](#)

John Dickson: International people say English is one of the hardest languages to learn. Why is that?

Simon Horobin: Well, I suppose, I mean, one thing I think is that whether a language is hard or difficult to learn does depend a bit on what your native language is. So that we tend to think that learning inflectional languages is much harder because we're native English speakers and we're not used to it. But that may not be true for others. I think another way in which English is very difficult is it's, it's so un phonetic that learning to read and write it a bit of a nightmare compared to say, Spanish or Finnish, which are highly phonetic or Arabic.

So there are different aspects of learning a language. Um, and of course you still do have to have that, some way of conveying that grammatical information. So that we may have ditched inflectional endings, but that means that word order has become much more important in modern English. So you have to get the words in the right order or it doesn't make

sense. Whereas of course, Germanic languages with their inflectional endings, you, you, you, you've got more freedom to move things around. So that there are different kinds of rules that you have to acquire.

John Dickson (Studio)

This brings us to the inherent challenge of the English language - its flexibility and change.

The Oxford English Dictionary has about 600,000 word entries. Astonishing.

But a Google / Harvard study from 2010 estimated that there were in fact over a million words in the English language ... and that number would climb by hundreds, even thousands, each year.

The Oxford English Dictionary has to play catch up. Recently they added ...

'Cosplay' - To dress up in costume as a character, esp. from anime, manga, video games, etc.

'Frontlash' - A reaction to a backlash.

And... 'Spidey sense' - a supernatural ability or power to perceive things beyond...

But with additions come losses. I asked Simon about one of the most annoying ones in the English language.

John Dickson: Well, let me just ask you the simple question about the loss of the distinction in English between a singular and a plural you, because there are hardly any other languages in the world that have lost a distinction

between singular and plural you. We see you, and we have no idea if it's singular or plural.

Simon Horobin: Yeah, exactly. So that, that goes back to So, in Old English, you've got thew and you've got yai. Um, which then in Early Modern English is thou and yee. And those two, in Old English, are just used as singular and plural. But in Middle English, they start to be used, um, to, so you can use the, the, um, plural form to refer to a singular person as a mark of respect, deference, in the same way that you would say in German, yeah, with, with Sie, or in French with vous.

I mean, it's to do with contact with French, actually, and the way that French culture was perceived as being prestigious. And this is a mode of address that is seen as being decorous and therefore was adopted in English. And, as a consequence, the vowel pronoun, um, the singular one, is seen as being, um, familiar and informal. And also, if you want to be deliberately disrespectful to somebody. Um, and that's the system that Shakespeare inherits in the early modern period, and you can see that that's become very much codified, because there's an example, for instance, in Twelfth Night, where So Andrew Aguecheek is advising Toby Belch how to write an insulting letter, and he says if thou voused him thrice it will be well. You know, it's actually a verb to thou somebody.

READING

- ANDREW Will either of you bear me a challenge to him?

- TOBY Go, write it in a martial hand. Be curst and brief. It is no matter how witty, so it be eloquent and full of invention. Taunt him with the license of ink. If thou "thou"-est him some thrice, it shall not be amiss, and as many lies as will lie in thy sheet of paper, although the sheet were big enough for the bed

of Ware in England, set 'em down. Go, about it. Let there be gall enough in thy ink, though thou write with a goose-pen, no matter. About it.

Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, Act 3, Scene 2

Simon Horobin: good example that they really, yeah, they really used it. Um, but then the, the sort of, the corollary of that is that to use vow with somebody, Can be over familiar or insulting. And so as a consequence, people began to be, to default to the plural form, the polite form.

John Dickson: Huh.

Simon Horobin: And so, that becomes more common, and the vow form is only saved for particularly significant moments. I mean, in Troilus and Cryseyde, Chaucer's great love poem, where you have the love between those two, they always call each other by the plural pronoun, apart from one moment, where Troilus says significantly to Cryseyde, I am thine.

READING

To that Cressid answered right at once,
and with a sigh she said: 'O heart dear,
the game, truly, has so far now gone,
that Phoebus shall first fall from his sphere,
and every eagle with a dove pair,
and every rock out of its place start,
before Troilus out of Cressid's heart.

You are so deep within my heart engraved,
that if I wished to turn you from my thought,

as sure as I hope God will my soul save,
were I to die in torture, I could not.
And, for the love of God that has us wrought,
let in your brain no other fantasy
creep so that it brings death to me.

And that you should have me as fast in mind
as I have you, that I would you beseech:
and if I knew in truth that's what I'd find,
God could not Himself me new joy teach.
But, my heart, without more speech,
be true to me, or else it were a woe:
for **I am thine**, by God and my truth, so.

Troilus and Criseyde, Geoffrey Chaucer

Simon Horobin: You know, and that's, that's a really powerful thing. significant moment because he's switching to, to the, to the really familiar and intimate pronoun. And then of course, you've also got, um, the Quaker movement who believed that, um, there should be no kind of hierarchies amongst the Christian brotherhood. And they deliberately use the thou pronoun as a kind of marker. And because of that association, thou also becomes slightly marked. And so as a consequence, you becomes much more of the default pronoun, and as a result, thou just falls out of use entirely. Apart from in religious usage, you still get it in the authorised version, it's part of that same process of archivisation.

John Dickson: But it's helpful, because they actually translate the Greek singular with the English singular. Yeah, exactly. And that distinction's completely Gone.

Simon Horobin: Yeah.

John Dickson: You know, where Jesus says, you know, you are the light of the world. Is that you, Simon? Or is it youse, as we say in Australia?

Simon Horobin: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Well, that's a nice example of a number of ways in which, um, English speakers, you know, different varieties of English speakers have tried to compensate for that loss.

John Dickson (Studio)

I finished my interview by trying to resolve some debates over English - debates I have with friends, family ... Americans ...

John Dickson: So, um, I want to do a rapid fire. Okay. It's not often I, I get to,

Simon Horobin: Can I say pass?

John Dickson: No, no, you'd have to give me your, your, your gut feeling. Okay. Uh, I've got a professor of English in the room. You just got to resolve all these, um, these

Simon Horobin: Right.

John Dickson: on a, should it have a U or not?

] **Simon Horobin:** Yes.

John Dickson: Synthesize Zed or S.

spell it. Oh, well, then it must be right. Um, the Oxford comma, yes or no?

Simon Horobin: Yes, thank you, thank you, thank you. Correct answer. It's the t's the OUP style guide, so I have to go with

John Dickson: Okay. Can you explain once and for all the difference between the words affect and effect?

Simon Horobin: Um, well affect is to do with emotion and effect is to do with having some kind of impact upon something.

John Dickson: Good. Are my students listening?
Um, explain why we mustn't say Simon and myself sat down.

Simon Horobin: well because it's, it's the subject, so you need the subject pronoun.

John Dickson: excellent single quotation marks or double quotation marks.

Simon Horobin: Double inside the single.

John Dickson: Beautiful. Is regardless a word?

Simon Horobin: No.

John Dickson: Is it ever okay to start a sentence with and or but? Whoa, you heard it here first. Why is it correct to say a great green dragon and not a green great dragon?

Simon Horobin: Um, because of our adjective order in English, has certain complex rules about the order in which you should place size and colour. And I know that a younger Tolkien got picked up on that by his mother, and that was why he became a professor of English language at Oxford, to try and answer that question. And perhaps, uh, finally, and much is on the line here, Oxford English Dictionary or Merriam Webster.

John Dickson: Haha, correct. Simon Horobin, thank you so much for your time.

John Dickson (Studio)

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See ya...

Undeceptions is hosted by me, John Dickson, produced by Kaley Payne and directed by Mark Hadley.

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Our voice actors today were Yannick Lawry and Dakotah Love.

Our voice actor today was Yannick Lawry.

Our voice actor today was Dakotah Love.

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