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Autor: Radoslava Vysloužilová
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Anotace: Tento dokument je pracovním listem, který slouží jako podpůrný materiál k výuce anglického jazyka.
Development of the English Language in the Light of History

The development of the English language reflects the early history of Britain, the successive waves of invasion (Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian and Norman).

1. First the invasions of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes in the 5th and 6th centuries brought several dialects of the language, generally called Old English (sometimes also called Anglo-Saxon). It was an inflected Germanic (Teutonic) language, but not so highly inflected as Latin or Czech. This language was so different from Modern English that it cannot be understood without special study.

2. Then the Scandinavian invasion from the 8th to 10th centuries (the Viking Age 750 – 1050) added some words from Old Norse, including such familiar words as: birth, egg, fellow, husband, kid, knife, sister, they... Furthermore, some of the inflectional endings in Old English were lost or simplified as a result of Scandinavian influence. Both Old Norse and Old English were Germanic languages and therefore it was possible for the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes to understand one another approximately. Many words were the same or similar, only the endings were different. It was therefore natural for the speakers of the two languages to get along without the endings.

3. Finally, the Norman invasion in 1066 brought the impact of the French language. From the Norman Conquest onwards Old English became gradually blended with Norman French. The fusion of two different languages, one of which was Germanic and the other Romance (derived from Latin), is a comparatively rare phenomenon in linguistic history. In the process of the amalgamation of the two languages, which was practically completed by the time of Chaucer (who died in 1400), the English language lost most of its inflections and English grammar became generally simplified. Chaucer’s language still differs from Modern English, but it can immediately be recognized as “English”.
Chaucer’s spelling differed from that to Modern English, some of the words or forms he used have gone out of use or become archaic or the meanings of some words have changed. But the most characteristic feature of Chaucer’s language, compared with Old English, is the great number of French words which had become assimilated into English by the time Chaucer wrote Canterbury Tales. Chaucer used just over 8,000 words in his writings, and about 4,000 of them were of Romance origin, which is roughly the same ratio as in present-day English.

And thus the four centuries that followed the Norman Conquest can be characterized as the period in which Modern English was born by the gradual merging of the two different languages spoken by two different social classes: Old English, spoken by the people, and French, spoken by the ruling class, i.e. the King and the Norman nobility. In the history of the English language this period is called Middle English (from about 1100 till about 1500).

The last King to speak French was Richard II. His successor, Henry IV, spoke English. Since 1400 English has been used by all social classes in England, including the king and his Court.

The classical Renaissance of the 16th century led to further borrowing of Latin words. Many expressions were taken straight from Latin without change, e.g. area, axis, genius, species, major, minor.

The present-day English vocabulary is about half Germanic (Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian) and half Romance (French and Latin).

Modern English spelling (orthography) became permanently fixed in the 17th century. Since the 16th century, a number of radical changes have taken place in the pronunciation, but the orthography has practically remained unchanged. Consequently modern English spelling is not phonetic, but historical, reflecting the earlier stages of English pronunciation.
After reading the text, answer the following questions:

1. Name successive waves of invasions to Britain.
2. What is called Old English?
3. Name several words from Old Norse added to English.
4. Which language was spoken in a court after the Norman invasion?
5. Which language was spoken by ordinary people in the 11th century?
6. What is called Middle English?
7. Who was the last king who spoke French?
8. Name several words which were taken from Latin without change?
9. When was modern English spelling fixed?

*Materiál je určen pro bezplatné používání pro potřeby výuky a vzdělávání na všech typech škol a školských zařízení. Jakékoliv další využití podléhá autorskému zákonu.*

*Zdroje a literatura:*