The Spread of English in the British Isles

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Preddiplomski studij: Engleski jezik i književnost i Mađarski jezik i književnost

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dr. sc. Mario Brdar, red. prof.

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The spread of English in the British Isles

Abstract

The English language changed a lot since the first contact with the Romans in 43 B.C.E. and it is still changing today. When they left the British Isles, Romans left behind Latin, which later was of great importance to the English language, giving that many words we use today have Latin origin. After the Romans, Germanic tribes migrated to the British Isles, shaping England and starting the period of "*Old English*". In 1066 England is invaded again, this time by the Normans, who brought French and made it a number one language for the upper-class people. English survived thanks to the number of people who still used it in everyday conversation. It was so well imprinted that it was impossible for Latin or French to take over. However, the English language was highly influenced by those two languages. This period is called "*Middle English*" and during that time people such as Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower and John Lydgate were crucial in preserving and nurturing the English language. The period of "Early Modern English" was the time of great political and social changes, but also the time when the English language really expanded and gained in importance. William Shakespeare, Henry VIII, King James, Sir Thomas Elyot and many others played the part in shaping the English language. The last period, the one still active today, is called "*Modern English*" and is a period of constant improvements, changes and expansions.

Key Words

English language, period, migration, invasion, change, Latin, French, influence

Introduction

The English language is known today as the “borrowing” language. Throughout the history the English language evolved, expanded and spread across the globe, and is now one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. Many are to blame for this occurrence; from invaders and conquerors, to traders and migrants. Around 1,5 billion people in the world speak English, of which only a quarter are native speakers. English is a West Germanic language that originated from the Anglo-Frisian dialects and since then was heavily influenced by other nations and languages. This paper will introduce and examine the main 4 periods of English language and its spread on the British Isles, take a closer look at the famous people of that time, and inspect important literary works.

Roman influence (43 - 409 C.E.)

In the year 43 B.C.E. Romans began their invasion of the British Isles. They were under the command of Claudius who came on the throne after the "mad" emperor Caligula had been assassinated in 41 C.E. Roman Empire was already very powerful, rich, prosperous and vast, so those were not the reasons for invading Britain. Claudius wanted to secure his throne and what a better way than to achieve glorious military victory in Britain. Roman rulers were only respected if they proved themselves on the battlefield. What followed was a series of battles between British tribes and Roman military forces, because Celts would not tolerate intruders from a foreign country with a foreign speaking language.

"The progress of Roman control was not uninterrupted. A serious uprising of the Celts occurred in A.D. 61 under Boudicca (Boadicea), the widow of one of the Celtic chiefs, and 70,000 Romans and Romanized Britons are said to have been massacred" (Baugh and Cable 52). However, Romans were far more superior, so Celts had to choose between defeat and extermination. In the years that followed, Iron Age tribal centres were redesigned as Roman towns. Even though the Roman cults expanded, what was important was their fusion with the local Celtic beliefs. Only the lowland of Britain began to look similar to the Mediterranean when in the 4th century Christianity became official religion.

The structure of towns was Roman, but the people who built them were not; many of them converted themselves from Celtic warriors into Romanised men. England became a Latin speaking colony, although some Celts ignored and refused any of such changes. In the end, Romans had to withdraw their forces for they had big problems with Gothic tribes. Cities began to deteriorate, and the population also declined. Life in Post- Roman Britain was very difficult.

Romans left behind Latin which later fused with the language of Germanic tribes. A great number of inscriptions have been found and all of them were in Latin. However, those findings do not imply that the Latin language was used by the native population. Latin did not replace the Celtic language. “Its use by native Britons was probably confined to members of the upper classes and some inhabitants of the cities and towns. Occasional graffiti scratched on a tile or a piece of pottery, apparently by the worker who made it, suggest that in some localities Latin was familiar to the artisan class” (Baugh and Cable 53).

Although we refer to Latin as the “dead language”, we cannot be more wrong; Latin is preserved, among others, in English language. “As well as education, wine, roads, under-floor heating, and the fresh water system, the Romans gave us words and phrases. Far from being a dead language, Latin is alive and well, and may be found in a sentence near you.” (Oxforddictionaries.com).

These are just some of the words that have Latin origin and are still used today: computer, family, school, library, millennium, diploma, stadium, forum, auditorium, cathedral, creed and so on. “The Romans wrote their history, their literature and their laws. Before the Romans conquered Britain, very few people in Britain could read or write. Stories and knowledge were passed on by word of mouth. From Roman times onwards, people in Britain wrote things down. Educated people wrote in Latin, but later wrote books in their own languages…” (bbc.co.uk)

4 main periods of the English language

Old English – 5th -11th century

"It is sometimes described as the period of full inflections, because during most of this period the endings of the noun, the adjective, and the verb are preserved more or less unimpaired" (Baugh and Cable 58). Around the year 449 began the Germanic conquest of the British Isles. That is when the course of history was profoundly changed.

Three of the Germanic tribes are believed to be the founders of the English nation. According to Bede those tribes were Angles, Jutes and Saxons. In his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* Bede identifies three phases of settlement: an exploration phase, when mercenaries came to protect the resident population; a migration phase; and an establishment phase, when Anglo- Saxons started to control the areas of Britain. It is believed that the Angles were the ones to give England its name, i.e. *Englaland*, which means "the land of the Angles". "Britain had been exposed to attacks by the Saxons from as early as the fourth century" (Baugh and Cable 55). The Anglo Saxons had no central organization unlike the Romans.

"The Anglii settlements evolved into the kingdoms of East Anglia, Mercia, and Northumbria. The Saxons settlements appeared to have founded the kingdoms of Sussex, Wessex, and Essex. The Jutes appear to have predominated in Kent and the Isle of Wight. Wars between these kingdoms gradually resulted in the consolidation of three important kingdoms, Mercia, Northumbria and Wessex. War continued between these kingdoms as well as raids from the west and north, but they were stronger than the Romanized Britons and able to deal with these raiders. This was the England that the Vikings found when they began to raid" (histclo.com).

"The greatest influence of Latin upon Old English was occasioned by the conversion of Britain to Roman Christianity beginning in 597" (Baugh and Cable 87). At the end of the 6th century St. Augustine came to the British Isles, and he is considered to be the founder of the English Church. He was sent by the Pope to spread Christianity, and in 601 he became the Archbishop of Canterbury. "Clearly it was no small task that Augustine and his forty monks faced in trying to alter the age-old mental habits of such a people. They might even have expected difficulty in obtaining a respectful hearing. But they seem to have been men of exemplary lives, appealing personality, and devotion to purpose…" (Baugh and Cable 88). By the end of the 7th century most of the "Germanic England" was Christianised.

These are just some of many words which entered the English language and have their roots deeply related to church: *abbot, alms, altar, angel, anthem, Arian, ark, candle, canon, chalice, cleric, cowl, deacon, disciple, epistle, hymn, litany, manna, martyr, mass, minster, noon, nun, offer, organ, pall, palm, pope, priest, provost, psalm, psalter, relic, rule, shrift, shrine, shrive, stole, sub deacon, synod, temple, and tunic.*

"In the account of the Synod of Whitby in his Ecclesiastical History of the English People, Bede describes the showdown between the Irish Christianity epitomised by Saint Columba and the international Roman brand of Christianity which had been brought by Augustine. Bede ends his Ecclesiastical History bemoaning the laziness of the Anglo-Saxons who he saw as half-hearted Christians still holding onto Pagan practices. An organised and disciplined parish life which would regulate the beliefs and behaviour of the British people was still to mature" (bbc.co.uk).

The oldest surviving text of Old English literature is Cædmon's Hymn and also one of the oldest surviving samples of Germanic alliterative verse, composed between 658 and 680. It is a short poem written in honour of "God the Creator". It was written down in a Latin

translation by Bede in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* and in vernacular versions written down in several manuscripts of Bede's *Historia.*

It is almost impossible for today's speakers of English to understand anything written in Old English. That is because the English language went through so many changes, was influenced by so many nations and tribes, and also borrowed many of the words from other languages. These are just some of the Old English words:

"*mōdsefa, mōdgeþanc,mōdgeþoht, mōdgehygd, mōdgemynd, ōdhord* (hord=treasure), all meaning 'mind',' thought', 'understanding", "*glædmōdnes*'kindness',*mōdlufu* 'affection' (lufu=love),*unmōd*'despondency',*mōdcaru*'sorrow'(caru=care),*mōdlēast*'want of courage',*mādmōd*'folly',*ofermōdandofermōdigung*'pride',*ofermōdig*'proud',*hēahmōd*'proud', 'noble',*mōdhete* 'hate' (hete=hate)", "*micelmōd*'magnanimous',*swīþmōd* 'great of soul' (swīþ=strong),*stīþmōd* 'resolute', '*obstinate*'(stīþ=stiff, strong),*gūþmōd* 'warlike' (gūþ=war, battle), *torhtmōd* 'glorious' (torht=bright),*mōdlēof*' beloved' (lēof–dear)", "*lēohtfæt* 'lamp' (lēoht light+ fæt vessel), *medu-heall* 'mead-hall', *dægred*' dawn' (day-red), *ealohūs* 'alehouse', *ealoscop* 'minstrel', *ēarhring* 'earring', *eorþcræft* 'geometry, *fiscdēag* 'purple' (lit.fish-dye), *fōtādl* 'gout' (foot-disease), *gimmwyrhta* 'jeweler' (gem-worker), *fiellesēocnes* 'epilepsy' (falling-sickness; cf. Shakespeare's use of this expression in Julius Caesar), *frumweorc* 'creation' (from a beginning+ work), and many more" (Baugh and Cable 71).

Beowulf

The greatest work of Old English is *Beowulf.* It is the oldest surviving epic poem and the "earliest piece of vernacular European literature" (historymedren.about.com). "It is a narrative of heroic adventure relating how a young warrior, Beowulf, fought the monster Grendel, which was ravaging the land of King Hrothgar, slew it and its mother, and years later met his death while riding his own country of an equally destructive foe, a fire-breathing dragon" (Baugh and Cable 75). This poem is one of the best examples of how it was to live in heroic times, when honour, strength, loyalty and physical endurance were very important. *Beowulf* may have been written as an elegy for a king who died in the 7th century, but there is little evidence to support that. The poem contains many pagan elements, but there are also some Christian themes as well. This suggests that there were more than one author. "Others have seen it as symbolic of the transition from paganism to Christianity in early medieval Britain. The extreme delicacy of the manuscript, the two separate hands that inscribed the text and the complete lack of clues to the identity of the author make a realistic determination difficult at best" (historymedren.about.com).

Venerable Bede (672 – 735)

Being scholar, teacher, Doctor of the Church, Bede is also known as the “Father of English History”, even though he was just a simple monk. He was born at Tyne, and spent the rest of his life as a priest in Jarrow. Although he never left Jarrow and was also buried there, he became one of the most learned men in Europe. “He mastered Latin, Greek and Hebrew and had a good knowledge of the classical scholars and early church fathers” (Britannia.com).

His writings cover natural history, poetry, Biblical translations, chronology, saint’s lives and allegorical interpretations of scripture in both prose and verse. He is known to have written three Latin hymns. His most important work is undoubtedly *Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* completed in 731, a five volume work which records events from the arrival of Julius Caesar in 55 B.C.E. until 597. C.E. when Saint Augustine arrived to England. “Bede's writings are considered the best summary of this period of history ever prepared. Some have called it "the finest historical work of the early Middle Ages” (Britannia.com).

“"For if history records good things of good men, the thoughtful hearer is encouraged to imitate what is good; or if it records evil of wicked men, the good, religious reader or listener is encouraged to avoid all that is sinful and perverse, and to follow what he knows to be good and pleasing to God” (Bede).

Middle English – 11th-15th century

"In 1066 the English language once again showed an astonishing adaptability in surviving another major linguistic collision following the landing of the Norman French at Hastings" (McCrum, Cran and MacNeil 73). After the death of Edward the Confessor in 1066, the English throne remained empty. Edward died with no obvious successors, and his second cousin, William of Normandy, invaded England and took the throne by force. In September of 1066 Williams' army landed at Pevensey Bay. Harold, son of Godwin, who was elected to become the future king of England, was killed at the Battle of Hastings, and William was crowned King of England. With his granddaughter Matilda starts the Angevin dynasty. "The Normans seized control of their new territory with systematic rigour. Norman castles, built by English workmen, were garrisoned by Norman soldiers… William also purged the English church: Norman bishops and abbots gradually took over in the cathedrals and monasteries" (McCrum, Cran and MacNeil 73).

"William the Conqueror made an effort himself at the age of forty-three to learn English, that he might understand and render justice in the disputes between his subjects, but his energies were too completely absorbed by his many other activities to enable him to make much progress" (Baugh and Cable 118). Soon the English language was pushed to the end of the line, French became the smart language, and it was very fashionable to speak French among the upper-class people. Even today the use of French words in a conversation is considered to be very sophisticated and profound. Latin was used professionally and it remained the "principal language of religion and learning" (McCrum, Cran and MacNeil 75). However, the English language was still widely spoken and written among the common people. English managed to survive thanks to three important factors. First, Old English vernacular was too well established. Second, as soon as the Normans invaded England they began to marry those who they had conquered. "The two nations have become so mixed that it

is scarcely possible today, speaking of free men, to tell who is English and who is of Norman race" (Dialogus de Scaccario, McCrum, Cran and MacNeil 75,76). Third, in 1204 the Anglo-Normans lost their French territory across the Channel, which caused the Norman nobility, who had lands in both countries, to declare allegiance either to France or England. "As it is impossible that any man living in my kingdom, and having possessions in England, can competently serve two masters, he must either inseparably attach himself to me or to the king of England" (King of France).

For two hundred years after the Norman Conquest French was the language of the upper-class people in England, but the members of upper-class also tried to gather some knowledge of English in order to communicate with lower classes. Churchmen also needed the knowledge of English, while the kings and queens used the services of an interpreter. Soon even the members of middle-class such as clerks, stewards, knights, and free tenants started using French in everyday life, probably because most transactions and services were in French.

What we today call Middle English, at that time it was only the form of Old English written down. Spoken Old English lost most of its inflections by the time of the Norman Conquest and those changes appear in written Middle English. "Spoken English differed from county to county as it does in rural districts to this day" (McCrum, Cran and MacNeil 79). Middle English became much more important from the 14th century. "Eventually, towards the end of the period, the London dialect began to prevail and was used even by some non-native writers. Chaucer was from London, but John Gower was from Kent and John Lydgate from Suffolk, and these two writers also used London English" (Fennell A. 115). Latin and French were still strong competitors, but in the 15th century English prevailed and displaced them both. "English letters began to be written by 1420 and are the rule by 1450. Henry V (1413-1422) promotes the use of English in writing by example, and by about 1425 English has been

generally re-adopted. Wills also follow the general linguistic development: the wills of Henry IV, V and VI are all written in English" (Fennell A. 121).

It is no wonder that English language was heavily influenced with French, and that today we use a lot of words which have French origin. Some of those words are: *beef, mutton, porn, bacon, master, servant, bottle, dinner, supper, banquet, butcher, barber, carpenter, draper, grocer, mason, uncle, aunt, cousin, nephew, niece* etc.

"Much has been written about the lexical fields in which words were borrowed from French. The following brief list indicates some of the other areas of activity in which French superiority is assumed, and prestige borrowing took place: *parliament, bill, act, council, county, tax, custom, court, assize, judge, jury, justice, prison, chattel, money, rent, prince, duke, marquis, viscount, baron, battle, assault, siege, standard, banner, fortress, tower*" (Fennell A. 108).

Geoffrey Chaucer (1343 – 1400)

He was born in 1340 in a provincial middle-class family which had a wine business. He was educated as a squire in a noble household and he later joined the king's retinue. "From 1370 to 1391, Chaucer was busy on the king's business and home abroad… During these years he composed much of his best work: *The House of Fame*, *The Parlement of Fowles*, *Troilus and Criseyde* and translated the *Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius" (McCrum, Cran and MacNeil 81). He became very famous during his lifetime as an author, philosopher, alchemist and astronomer. Also, his life is very well documented and there are nearly five hundred documents which testify to his career. Chaucer travelled a lot, and one of his destinations was Italy. Whether he made acquaintance with Petrarch or Boccaccio we cannot tell with certainty. "By making a conscious choice to write in English, he symbolizes the rebirth of English as a national language" (McCrum, Cran and MacNeil 80). Between 1370 and 1390 he started working on his masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales.* It is a collection of over 20 stories which are presented as a story-telling challenge between pilgrims who are travelling together from Southwark to Canterbury. Chaucer used his characterization and stories to portrait, ironically and critically, the English society of that time. *The Canterbury Tales* are mostly written in verse, although some are written in prose. This work is very important for English literature because it popularized the literary use of vernacular English.

Early Modern English – 15th-17th century

"The EME period was a time of tremendous political, economic, technological and social change in Britain that was to change the size, shape and functioning of the world and with it the English language" (Fennell A. 136). After 1536 England became Protestant country thanks to Henry VIII. He had his infamous disagreement with the Rome and later became the head of the Church of England. Soon, there was an English translation of the Bible in every church. This was the time of William Shakespeare "who straddled the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods and who, in the eyes of the many, represents the pinnacle of English literary achievement" (Fennell A. 136).

During this period the culture simply flourished; England gained their first company of actors and the building of theatres in 1574. Also, the Elizabethan Age was the age of great colonial expansions, which brought England some really important overseas possessions. We are talking about South Africa, Baltic, Mediterranean, India and South America. During the reign of James I, England dealt with many difficulties, but nevertheless, many historical and significant events occurred. In 1611 the Bible of King James was published. It was more politically acceptable than the Geneva Bible, and it also "shore up the position of the king" (Fennell A. 137). This version of the Bible was used till 1960s, when the New English Bible was published.

> "The King James Bible was published in the year Shakespeare began work on his last play, The Tempest. Both the play and the Bible are masterpieces of English, but there is one crucial difference between them. Whereas Shakespeare ransacked the lexicon, the King James Bible employs a bare 8000 words – God's teaching in homely English for everyman. From that day to this, the Shakespearian cornucopia and the biblical iron rations represent, as it were, the North and South Poles of the language, reference

points for writers and speakers throughout the world, from the Shakespearean splendour of a Joyce or a Dickens to the biblical rigour of a Bunyan, or a Hemingway".

(McCrum, Cran and MacNeil 113)

"This short period, the lifespan of one man, saw the confluence of three immensely influential historical developments: the Renaissance, the Reformation and the emergence of England as a maritime power" (McCrum, Cran and MacNeil 93). During the Renaissance the England lived to see the revolution in communication. The usage of the printing press changed society. Before 1500, the total number of published books in England was around 35,000 and most of them were in Latin. But, between 1500 and 1640 around 20,000 literary items were printed, and all in English. All of this resulted in accelerated education of the middle-class people, and by 1600 nearly half the population had some kind of literacy. In 1531 Sir Thomas Elyot published *The Book Named the Governour* which was the first book on education printed in English. "Latin, after all, was still the universal medium of the written word, and Bacon, like many of his contemporaries, actually preferred to write in Latin, which he considered the proper medium of scholarship" (McCrum, Cran and MacNeil 93).

A scientific revolution also occurred during the Renaissance, and English language had to name all those new discoveries and introduce words to its vocabulary. This is when words like this were introduced: *atmosphere, pneumonia, skeleton, encyclopaedia, gravity, excrement, strenuous, excrescence, paradox, external, chronology* and so on. All of these words have Latin or Greek origin, but there were also French (*fanfare, clique, roulette, critique, envelope, salon, bouquet, canteen, brochure, rouge, picnic, etiquette, debut, pompom, police, hors d'oeuvre*…), Italian (*pedant, miniature, villa, balcony, broccoli, corridor, frigate, escort, bandit, volcano, tarantula, lava, casino, bronze, malaria, macaroon,*

post, pergola, solo, soprano, trombone…) and Spanish (*sherry, bravado, comrade, escapade, domino, stevedore, cockroach, mosquito, cargo, grandee, rusk*…) borrowings. "It was also difficult to say at this time whether a word was coming into the language from Latin directly or via French, since Latin words were being borrowed by their thousands into French at the same time, and French was definitely still an influence on English" (Fennell A. 148). During the Renaissance period between 10,000 and 12,000 new words were added to the English vocabulary. By 1700 English language stabilized and if were to read some of the works written at that time we would find it surprisingly easy to understand.

Since there were so many new words introduced into the language, English dictionaries had to explain difficult and rare words, e.g. Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabeticall*, 1694; Nathaniel Bailey's *An Universal English Dictionary*, 1721; *Dictionarum Britannicum*; Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 1755 onwards.

William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)

Born in Stratford-upon-Avon and baptised there on 26 April 1564, Shakespeare was English poet, playwright, actor, part-owner of a playing company called the *Lord Chamberlain's Men*, and some would suggest the greatest writer in the history of English literature. His work consists of 38 plays, 154 sonnets and two long narrative poems. His early plays were mostly comedies and most famous are *All's Well That Ends Well, As You Like It, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen.* His comedies usually had happy endings, and he also put emphasis on the situation rather than on characters. Later, Shakespeare wrote tragedies until 1608 which are now considered one of the fines works in the English language. Those are *Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* and *Troilus and Cressida.* Shakespeare was recognized and respected during his lifetime, but during Romanticism and Victorian Era was he worshipped and considered a genius.

> "The vocabulary of William Shakespeare illustrates a number of trends in the language of the EME period. Firstly, the lexicon expands dramatically, incorporating many new words which are quite common, even indispensable, today, e.g., agile, critical, demonstrate, emphasis, horrid, modest, accommodation, apostrophe, assassination, frugal, obscene, reliance, vast."
>
> (Fennell A. 147)

Modern English – 17th century-present

This was a period when English language was adopted in other parts of the world, all thanks to colonization. When we talk about the British Isles, industrialization, urbanization and revolution in manufacturing and agriculture had big effect on the English language. All of this caused the expansion of towns, adoption of modern farming methods, large-scale production, and decline in the number of people working on farms, "more and more people took work in industry, commerce and finance" (Fennell A. 170).

The basic structure of the English was mostly established in the 18th century. Since then only minor changes occurred; there are few changes in phonology, morphology and syntax. What changed the most was the lexicon of English language. This is mostly due to the scientific- technological development and also the rise of the computer sciences at the end of the 20th century. Today, we recognize two "standards" of English; the national and the international, and most dictionaries recognize this division.

"The following is a partial list of loan-words into English from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from languages and cultures as far apart as France and China" (Fennell A. 175,176): *café, hangar, limousine, courgette, lasagne, diva, spaghetti, gorgonzola, al dente, dolce vita, mustang, ranch, rodeo, macho, salsa, fajita, burrito, piranha, samba, poodle, semester, lager, blitz, vodka, Kalashnikov, gulag, yoga, tandoori, pukka, poppadum, tikka, jihad, corgi, tycoon, jujitsu, sumo, tofu, kimono, bonsai, karate, origami, karaoke, mah-jong, dim sum, wok* and so on.

We can divide Modern British English dialects into two types, traditional and modern. The traditional dialects, also called the rural, are those spoken in rural areas by less educated people. The modern, or the urban dialects, are spoken in the Home Counties (six counties around London) and are associated with young people and middle- and upper-class.

"The role of English in England is clearly dependent on dialect, the social prestige of RP and EE, and changing population profiles across the island. The role and status of English in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales – originally Celtic- speaking countries – differ markedly from the English situation, especially given interaction with indigenous languages; but the three are very different, and the status of English differs greatly from one to another."

(Fennell A. 191)

In Scotland there is a dialect of English which evolved into a separate language, Scots; this is very unusual, and also unlikely to happen anywhere else in the world. Because of the political changes, Scots lost its position and Standard English dominated. Despite this, there are people using spoken Scots today, and some are also trying to revive it as a literary language. In Wales, what caused the spread of English was not the number of English establishments, but rather trade and commerce. To help keeping the Welsh language alive there are Welsh-language societies, television and radio broadcasts and literature and poetry are still printed in Welsh. "But, again, as in the case of Scots in Scotland, it will be the speakers, and the desire to keep the language alive as the first language, that hold the key" (Fennell A. 197). In Ireland English is not the native language and the history between England and Ireland is filled with blood, armies and questions about sovereignty. Naturally, during those bloody collisions two languages mixed and made a culture. "In Britain, the Irish literary achievement – the long roll-call of names that includes Spenser, Congreve, Swift, Sheridan, Wilde, Yeats, Synge, Shaw, Joyce, Beckett and Heaney – has become assimilated into the tradition of English writing" (McCrum, Cran and MacNeil 163). After 1916 (the Easter Uprising) it was too late for the Irish language to save its position as a national language.

Conclusion

British English has a very exciting history. There is no language in the world that has such an ability to adapt and change as the English has. Throughout the history of the British Isles, English survived wars, invasions, migrations and impositions of other important languages. It rose from the very bottom to the world's leading language, today used as a universal *lingua franca*. In this paper we could observe the path and many obstacles English language had to cross to become what it is today, the most important language in the world. It is changing day after day, now more than ever and thanks to its amazing ability to evolve it has very impressive lexicon.

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