

An elementary overview of the influence of French in English and vice versa

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Language is the principle tool which differentiates man from animals. Unlike animals, man is able to generate an unlimited number of sounds and utter a specific system of sounds which we call 'language'. Though animals too are able to communicate with each other to some extent, it's very limited and it's limited to their kind. Yet man has reached the zenith in his civilization with the help of 'human language' which produces innovative, unlimited and simple and complex utterances.

As we are aware, all the people in this globe do not use only one human language. Due to geographical variations, culture, religion, politics and heritage, people have divided themselves into many a language. It has been estimated that around five thousand languages exist all over the world. Among them, English and French languages have gained a higher reputation. English has already become a global language and an international lingua franca (linking language) over four hundred million native speakers and roughly the same number who speak it as a second language. All the five continents use English as their mother tongue, official language (language used in government, administration and education at national, regional or local level), foreign language or

vehicular language (language used as a means of communication by speakers of different languages).

Similarly, French is also spoken on every continent and presently over seventy seven million first language speakers and another fifty one million second language speakers use it as their mother tongue, official language, vehicular language, vernacular language or foreign language. According to the number of speakers, French goes to the tenth or eleventh position behind Chinese, English, Hindi, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Bengali, Portuguese, Malay and possibly Japanese. Yet, as a world language, it is second only to English with its presence throughout the world and its cultural prestige, irrespective of the number of speakers.

Therefore it's apparent that both English and French play a dominant role on every continent in the globe. History provides clues that French was used as the language of international diplomacy from the 17th to the 20th centuries. Today, English is the main contender for the position of world lingua franca. Therefore, the observation of rise and fall of these two languages together with its former and present status would be significant. French which held the crown earlier has gradually lost its status and English which nourished itself by the lexicon of most of the languages has already reached the summit. This observation would be a comparison of these two powers. The history and even the present status reveal the similarities and disparities existing between the two languages, the dominance and the prestige that each language enjoy and the way in which the two languages are connected and affect each other. The very example to manifest the dominance of French over English in old days is the Middle English period which runs from the beginning of the 12th century until the middle of the 15th. This period marks the gradual decay of Old English (Anglo Saxon traditions and literary practices) and the sudden emergence of French. With the Norman Conquest (1066AD), French was rapidly established in power. French speaking noblemen, abbots and bishops took over the government administration, education and literature. Within twenty years of the invasion, all the religious houses were under the superior Frenchmen. English became the language of the common man and the lower classes. Authors wrote literature in French and not in English. For all practical purposes, English was no longer a written language. Churches and monasteries were gradually filled with French speakers rather than English speakers. Bilingualism became a common feature especially among those who dealt with both the nobility and the commoners. With this social upheaval, English language too underwent changes. English people learnt French in order to gain advantages from the aristocracy and the people in power. Also, the baronial staff learnt English in order to keep daily

contact with local communities. Yet there's hardly any sign of English being used among the new hierarchy and this situation continued for over a century.

As the time passes, English regained its status within the 12th century itself through social interactions like marriages between the French and the English. Yet French continued to be used in parliament, courts and in public proceedings. The beginning of the diminution of French commences with the conflict with king Philip of France by John of England and this led ultimately to the hundred years of war (1337-1453). English nationalism grew with this and in 1362; English was used for the first time at the opening of Parliament. Significant personalities like Queen Elizabeth, Shakespeare and Samuel Jonson contributed a lot to the rise of the English language. This entire historical story marks the influence of French over English. The stock of French words flowed into the English language prove this interaction and relationship vividly.

Stock of French words and expressions borrowed into English

The French language has had a profound influence on the development of the English language. Words of French origin are crucial for such subject matters as law, religion, administration, politics and fine arts. French and English languages have been borrowing from one another even before the Norman Conquest in 1066. Yet the extent of borrowing from English to French is lesser. It's said that nearly thousand words had been absorbed into English from French during the Middle English period and it continued even in other periods such as the Renaissance period (1500-1660) and the Age of Enlightenment (1650-1800).

Some political and administrative words of French origin

alliance	council	nobility	treaty
aAssembly	empire	parliament	tax

Some French cooking and drinking words of French origin

à la carte	gâteau	plat	casserole	pasta	
bon appétit	pizza	sandwich	café	omlet	vin

Some religious words of French origin

baptism	divine	sacrifice	clergy	faith	religion
confession	miracle	pray	convent	mercy	sermon

Other words of French origin

active	banquet	cadre	enemy	advance	army
chief	age	buffet	color	dozen	aim

French expressions used in English

C'est la vie (That's life)

Bonjour (Have a good day)

Bon Voyage (Have a good journey)

This is only a tip of an ice berg. Thousands of many other English words of French origin remain there. Anybody would be surprised by the fact that most of the words which we use in our day to day conversation have their origin in French with no hint of Foreignness.

Through political, economic, geographic, social and religious progress made by English speaking nations, over the decades and centuries, English has spread to every corner in the world. It enjoys a much higher and significant position than its revolutionary past. From a historical point of view, this diffusion might be due to colonization and the supreme status that the British Isles maintained in the last few centuries. From a linguistic point of view, this might be due to its uncomplicated phonology, the flow of morphological system and the simple syntactic style. Unlike any other language, English has undergone many linguistic changes in its phonological, morphological, syntactic components. Presently, a wide variety of English as British English, American English, Australian English, Canadian English, Indian English and Sri Lankan English are apparent. The reason behind this creation of varieties of English is its exposure to multilingual societies and its nativization.

We can see that English is being enriched with thousands of foreign words and expressions irrespective of whether Japanese, Chinese, French or Sanskrit. Though English has its own native variety in several countries, it seems that this process is accepted today. According to David Crystal, "within a generation or two, international standard English will have fragmented into a range of only partly intelligible dialects" (274). Anyhow, this manifests that while some languages strictly reject the intervention of English in their languages, English is gaining a stable position while adopting lexicons from many global languages.

Over the centuries, things have undergone a big change. With the spread of English all over the globe, the status of French is not apparent so largely. Anyhow French people keep an eye on treats coming from the English language to their mother tongue. Not only France but also the powerful countries like Japan keep away from English and strictly resist it in all their activities and affaires as they want to preserve the prestige of their language without subjecting to the invasion of English. Therefore, it is clearly evident that some communities put an effort to preserve their own language and to make an identity of their own before the ups and downs of globalization. The following paragraph reveals how keen French people are to preserve their language from the 'Coco-cola culture'.

In France, just as in Britain, the native speakers are aware of the established norms of the standard of their language together with correct usage in grammar, vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation. They continued it over centuries and in the modern society too, the standard language paves the way to communicate, govern and educate effectively and efficiently by resisting change and variation. Yet in the 20th century, French was under the threat of English referred to as 'coca-cola culture' which was gaining international presence. Some spoken expressions and borrowings from English flew into the French language.

Directly imported words of English into French

badge	club	hippie	car park
boss	hi-fi	groom	record
because	handicap	o.k	self-service
boycott	one-man show		tunnel

Names of sports Names of music Francization of English words

football	Jazz	baby (baby)
basketball	rap	beefsteak (beefsteak)
tennis	folk song	fuel (fuel)

Fortunately, together with the leadership of the French governor 'General de Gaulle' who stands as a debate about the protection of the French language came into discussion. The particular target of this brainstorming discussion was the stock of Anglo-American vocabulary which had been borrowed into French. And this mixture of French and English words and terms was referred to as 'franglais' (français+ anglais). With the rise of this anti- English notion and anti-Americanism, the French government intervened in some sort of policy making for the French language. The consequent result was the setting up of organizations to develop officially approved terminology, monitor the quality of French used in official documents and the media and to safeguard the position of the French language internationally. The 1st government body to be established for these purposes was 'Le Haut Comité de la langue française' to protect and expand the French language (1966) Its three principle objectives are

- (1) To study and recommend measures to ensure the defense and the expansion of the French language.
- (2) To establish the necessary links with private and public organizations competently in matters of cultural and technical cooperation.
- (3) To promote and encourage all initiatives linked to the defense and expansion of the French language and to evaluate the results achieved.

The committee was responsible for establishing official terminology in specialized fields (eg:- IT & Business) and suggest appropriate alternatives to borrowings. The institution called 'Delegation generale a la langue française' formulates and monitors governmental language policy and coordinates the work of the ministerial commissions whose decisions are periodically brought together in a dictionary of official terms (Dictionnaire des termes officiels).

*In 1985, *baladeur* was proposed to replace 'walkman'

logiciel for 'software'

commercialisation for 'marketing'

*In 1990, the adoption of the term '*ludiciel*' for *didacticiel*

'CD-ROM' for *cederom*

'*message electronique*' for 'e-mail'

Despite these efforts to define French from English terms, media journalists are accused of destroying the French language for using English expression. Yet the linguists also reject the idea that French is under serious threat from English.

The government is involved in controlling not only vocabulary but also grammar further. A committee which serves as a watchdog the usage of the French language was set up in 1976 namely 'L'Association general des usagers de langue francaise (AGULF). Its aim was to provide a forum for those French speakers who are worried about the linguistic and cultural patrimony. These are some measures taken by the French government together with the consent of its people to defend their mother-tongue from the outer world.

These efforts reveal the importance of the language to its users as a symbol of national identity in a surrounding of a linguistic, economical and social insecurity.

On the contrary, it's remarkable that the emergence of varieties of English has become unstoppable now because of its rapidity of growth and its exposure to various social and cultural diversities. At present, English is the main language of books, newspapers, airports, conferences, science, technology, diplomacy, sport and international competitions. Also three quarters of the world's mail is written in English; about 40 per cent of business deals are made in English; 85% of published scientific books and journals are in English and though there are more native speakers of Chinese than of English, English is the major language of international communication.

Every living language is under the influence of other living languages. Any language might totally transform into a new form in future as a mixture of all

characteristics failing to preserve its formal prestige and standard. Views are on the rise that English is a 'killer language'. Presence of English has generated antagonism because of its interference with the local languages. Nationalistic movements may totally reject it and it's not always peaceful.

The realization of all these supportive views and contra-views lead to one conclusion. That is that English has indeed become a world language, but it is by no means everywhere and it is by no means always welcome. The reason for comparing the status of French and English is that French and English stand as the best examples to surface language harmony and language resistance.

Both French and English have contributed to each other in more or lesser content and a satisfactory interrelationship can be seen. English people do not hesitate to say 'au revoir' (meaning 'see you' in French) or 'Bon voyage' (meaning 'happy journey' in French) and French people saying 'o.k.' instead of saying 'ca va' sometimes. The following paragraph will be an indication of the marvelous inter-homonal relationship between French and English despite all the negative views.

French and English are similar in their basic language patterns. This harmony itself may serve for the status of English and French, the former as the first international language and the latter as the second international language. French and English derive from two language families: French being a Romance language and English being a Germanic language. Yet we can see that some linguistic components bear similarities primarily to an extent. The two alphabets exhibit same letters in form and quiet similar pronunciation. This phonetic similarity leads to similar pronunciations in words too. When words move from one language to another sometimes it remains in a kind of no man's land. Some words in both languages show a phonetic similarity.

English

Generation
Telephone
Collection

French

Generation
Telephone
Collection

Above details pave the way to another discovery which is the similarity of some lexical items in French and English. Hundreds of words are found in both languages with similar spellings and similar meanings.

Nouns with similar letters and similar meanings

<u>English</u>	<u>French</u>
1. catalogue	catalogue
2. extravagant	extravagant
3. limitation	limitation
4. profession	profession
5. solution	solution

Similar verbs with an adding of '-er'

<u>English</u>	<u>French</u>
1. remark	remarker
2. prolong	prolonger
3. mark	marquer
4. detach	detacher
5. console	consoler

There's always mutual influence as languages come into contact with each other. English itself has a long history of borrowings from other languages as started earlier and is always ready to increase its lexicon by acquiring loan words. Other languages (except some languages) too borrow heavily from English. Through the above examples, it's clear that no language has an independent existence. At least in their history, those languages had influenced each other. Whether to label these remains as 'Language harmony' or 'Language invasion' needs a second thought. Several political, social and cultural backgrounds affect this language mixture.

Some semantic similarities can also be observed between French and English. Their grammatical systems are very similar in most ways. There are the same parts of speech categories and the word order is similar to a larger extent. French has singular and plural verb forms, definite and indefinite articles, regular and irregular verbs, auxiliary verbs, active and passive forms and past, present and future tenses. Out of these, a few will be elaborated. French has only two genders (masculine & feminine including non-living things) whereas English has three genders mainly categorized as masculine, feminine and neuter genders. Yet, in some instances, especially in literary writings, some inanimate nouns in English too take the masculine or feminine forms and this shows the harmony between the two languages.

Britain and her sovereignty

Titanic, her fatal voyage

Some English words have their established feminine or masculine forms.

Moon- feminine

Sun- masculine

Thunder- masculine

In case of plurality too, French and English Languages show similarities. Generally, the plurals of most of nouns in French are formed by adding 's' to the singular noun as in English.

Garçon	Garçons
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Train	Trains
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Voyage	Voyages
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A French speaker or an English speaker would not find it difficult to express what they want in any tense as the occasion where most of the tenses used in English and French are similar.

Je visite le Sri Lanka

I visit Sri Lanka

J'ai visité le Sri Lanka

I visited Sri Lanka

Je visitera le Sri Lanka

I will visit Sri Lanka

Thus, this observation, rather, the comparison of pronunciation, words and grammar of the French language and the English language would surface the story of language harmony, language inter-dependence and language mixture. There's always mutual influence as languages come into contact with each other. No language has an independent existence. At least their history reveals their influence upon each other. Whether to label these remains in each language as a mark of 'language harmony' and 'inter-dependence' or as 'language invasion' needs a second thought since this is an on-going process in all the living languages and this question is related with the factors such as politics, society, culture, religion and colonization.

Any living language doesn't stand still. Also no language is higher or richer than the other languages. Every language has its unique characteristics as well as compositional characteristics. Since Language reflects the society, the tracing of the evolution of languages marks certain significant factors too. Many factors contribute to the gradual spread of a language, chiefly political and military might, economic power and religious influence. Willingly or unwillingly, the development of that world Language has to be accepted and the influence of it on world affairs is unstoppable. This story of French and English languages is a fine revelation of the story of the interaction between languages and their influence upon each other. The objective of denoting the history and the present status of the French language and the English language with its' successes and failures is to draw a picture of language mixture and their inability to refuse the influence upon each other.

Though it's difficult to define whether it is 'language harmony', 'language refusal' or 'language influence', mixing up of languages is an on-going process. This journey through French and English languages, together with a historical account of borrowings and other characteristics leaves traces of the destiny of languages all over the globe.

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