

NEWSREEL WORLD

2021-11-27



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ALANNA LESLIE: Hi, I'm Alanna Leslie and welcome to Newsreel World.

Today, we're doing something a bit different.

We normally bring you stories from the English-speaking world but this week we're going to bring you stories about English the language instead.

So if you've ever wondered why you're sitting here learning English instead of another language, here's why.

ALANNA LESLIE: Let's start at the beginning.

Where and when did English come into existence and why did it take over the world?

Kevin Stroud has been exploring the history of the English language in his podcast *The History of English* since 2012.

He takes us on a quick historical hike through the English language.

Kevin Stroud: English did not actually originate in England. It began in the region around modern-day Germany and Scandinavia over 2000 years ago.

Around 1500 years ago, there was a significant migration of people from that region of northern Europe into southern Britain.

These people came from various tribal groups known as the Angles, the Saxons, the Jutes and the Frisians.



Kevin Stroud: All languages constantly evolve and change. Very soon after they arrived, their dialect became distinct from the Germanic dialects spoken back on the continent where they came from.

Very soon, the Anglo-Saxon speech patterns had become distinct enough that linguists consider it to be the earliest form of English.

Then in 1066, England was invaded by the Normans from northern France.

For the next three centuries, English borrowed a tremendous amount of words directly from French.

By the early 1500s, the English language had evolved and expanded so much that it had entered an altogether new phase: Early Modern English, the language of William Shakespeare.

Around the time that Shakespeare was composing his well-known plays, English explorers were starting to establish settlements in North America. That was really the beginning of what would eventually evolve into the British Empire.

English spread throughout North America, Australia, New Zealand, India, South America and many other places around the world.

As the British Empire declined in the 20th century, the United States emerged as a global superpower in its wake, and that further reinforced the influence of English around the world.

ALANNA LESLIE: Thanks Kevin.

We've heard where English came from and how it got to where it is today.

But how much do you know about the Swedish influence on the US?

Today, around ten percent of people have Swedish heritage in Minnesota, more than in any other American state.

Britta Greene reports from the city of Minneapolis in Minnesota.



Britta Greene: It's midday at Ingebretsen's Scandinavian market and there's a steady stream of customers coming in and out.

Julie Ingebretsen: "Yea, the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas is pretty whacky."

Britta Greene: This is Julie Ingebretsen, who manages the gift shop side of the business.

Julie Ingebretsen: "You hear a lot of Scandinavian, Swedish, Danish, which is really fun. Last year, there was a guy outside in the line, leading Christmas carols."

Britta Greene: Karen Hanes Turnquist has been working at the shop nearly thirty years. She says customers will often have tears in their eyes coming back, year after year to celebrate the traditions they remember from childhood or to recount recent visits to Sweden.

She herself has tried to learn Swedish, but she's never become proficient enough to talk with customers who are fluent.

Turnquist: "We know the "förstår du" - understand - "kom få du maten" - that type of thing that we said as children but I always tell them I don't speak it cause then they start talking to me and it's like 'no no no, slow down'."

Britta Greene: Nearby, thirty-year old Nichelle Nagel is shopping with her mom. She says she recently used a genetic testing service to find out about her roots in Norway and Sweden. Like a lot of people her age, she's wanting to know more about her heritage.

She wishes she learned more of the language and culture as a child, but she's working now to teach herself what she can.

Nichelle: "So I actually make the kransekakor which is like the ring cake, and then also I do rosemaling."

Britta Greene: Even with the Swedish language being mostly lost here, there are still common phrases and expressions that hark back. Ingrid Nyholm-Lange is with the American-Swedish Institute in Minneapolis.



Ingrid Nyholm-Lange: “People who have no Scandinavian language abilities but are here in Minnesota they’ll say like - ooo ya. Or you’ll hear them breathe in. And those are definitely pieces of the language that came and have been embedded in Minnesota culture.”

Britta Greene: Interestingly, much of what’s known of Swedish language, culture and tradition here dates back to those early years.

Ingrid Nyholm-Lange, for example, learned Swedish from her father as she grew up here in the U.S. But when she went back to Sweden more recently to study, she realised her vocabulary was out of date.

Ingrid Nyholm-Lange: “A word for friend in Swedish “kompis”. My parents used the older version of that “mina väninnor”. So people would often look at me and be like, why are you using that old-fashioned word? That was the word in the language that was frozen in time.”

Britta Greene: Nyholm-Lange oversees the Swedish Institute’s language classes. She says recently, interest in Swedish courses for adults has skyrocketed, especially as they’ve been able to offer courses online.

This is Britta Greene reporting from Minneapolis, Minnesota for Newsreel World.

ALANNA LESLIE: Thanks Britta.

The spread of English began during the period of European colonisation.

Over time, many of these colonies developed a unique pidgin language.

One country where this has happened is Nigeria.

Keyu Eteng reports from Calabar to tell us more:

Keyu Eteng: My name is Keyu and whenever I’m with my friends, we speak pidgin English.



The very best way to explain what pidgin English is, is to hear people speak it. I got together with two of my friends, Umoh and Preye, and they're going to help me explain what pidgin English is.

Keyu: "So Preye, how would you explain pidgin to someone, like a non-Nigerian, who doesn't know it?"

Preye: "Pidgin English, it's a simple way of communicating."

Keyu Eteng: After we negotiated independence from the British, we decided to use English as the language for all official and government business.

Here in Nigeria we have over 400 languages and dialects so we need one common language that we can all use for official businesses. But for non-official business and in our everyday life, we use pidgin English.

Preye: "Pidgin English is coined from standard English. Now I say that because for instance if I'm saying 'I dey go somewhere.' Now go is standard English, somewhere is standard English, I is standard English. So it's just a simple way of communicating. Imagine if somebody wants to go to school. You would say 'I dey go school.'"

Keyu Eteng: But not every word that we use in Pidgin is related to English.

There are some words that we use in pidgin which are actually related to Portuguese.

For example, the word sabi which in Portuguese means "to know". We use that in pidgin.

'You sabi speak pidgin?' "Do you know how to speak pidgin?"

My friends Umoh and Preye are going to teach you how to speak some words and phrases in pidgin.



Keyu: “How do you greet someone in pidgin?”

Preye: How you dey na?

Umoh: “I dey hail o.”

Keyu: “How are you?”

Preye and Umoh: “How you dey?”

Keyu: “Where are you going to?”

Preye and Umoh: “Where you dey go?”

Keyu: “How do you say please?”

Preye and Umoh: “Abeg.”

Keyu: “Thank you?”

Preye and Umoh: “Weldone.”

Keyu: “Goodbye?”

Preye and Umoh: “Una bye bye.”

Keyu Eteng: Until next time, my name be Keyu Eteng. I dey report for Newsreel World from Calabar, Nigeria. Una bye bye.

ALANNA LESLIE: Thanks Keyu.

And finally...

ALANNA: “Wagwan.” “Big up yourself.”

ALANNA LESLIE: Those are examples of “slang.”

And I’m guessing you know it’s language you’re more likely to use when you’re chatting with friends than when writing an essay.

So when learning to speak English, you’re likely to use phrases you would never see written down.



The word slang originated in the 18th century and refers to the vocabulary of "low" or "disreputable" people.

But not everyone views slang this way now.

Here's Anne Curzan, Dean of Literature, Science, and the Arts at the University of Michigan, talking about her perspective on slang in a Ted Talk.

Anne Curzan: "When I teach the history of the English language, I require that students teach me two new slang words before I will begin class. I have learned some great new slang this way, including "hangry," which is when you are cranky or angry because you are hungry, and "adorkable," which is when you are adorable in kind of a dorky way."

ALANNA LESLIE: Grammar is of course important but fundamentally learning a language is about being understood.

I hope you enjoyed that exploration of the English language.

That's all from me today, and for this year! Have a lovely Christmas and New Year. Bye!