

The Mother Tongue Book Summary, by Bill Bryson

by Allen Cheng

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1-Page Summary of The Mother Tongue

Overview

English is a language that we use every day, but most of us don't think about where the words come from. However, each and every word has a rich history behind it. This article takes you through the history of English and shows how these key points show how Western civilization developed over time. Along the way, you'll learn more about our culture as well.

You will also learn about the names people came up with for things they had never seen before, as well as who invented the most words in English. You will find out which words are shared by Americans and Europeans.

Big Idea #1: Many of the world's languages can be traced back to a common ancestral language.

Many people believe that the world is more connected than ever before. However, this may not be true because of the advent of technology and social media. Although we are connected in many ways, such as through language, it's nothing new. In fact, one way to measure global connection is through words like "brother" or "sister." They're similar across different languages because they have a common origin in

ancient times.

Sir William Jones learned Sanskrit in India, even though it was long dead. The priests had memorized certain hymns called the Vedas and were passing them down from generation to generation without understanding what they meant.

Jones noticed that there were many similarities between the European languages and Sanskrit. For example, in Latin, "king" is "rex", and in Sanskrit it's "raja". And Sanskrit for the English word "birch" is *bhurja*.

Jones noticed that many languages have similar grammatical structures. He then compared those languages to Sanskrit, and found more evidence for his theory that all these languages are derived from a common parent language.

Eventually, Jones presented his theory in Calcutta. This presentation led to a new field of study and inspired European scholars to conduct their own research. The Europeans eventually agreed with Jones' hypothesis and named the parent language Indo-European. Despite the fact that no writings exist from this language's speakers, linguists have been able to deduce quite a bit about them by analyzing descendent languages.

The words for snow and cold are similar, implying that the Indo-Europeans lived in places with a moderate climate. The same is true of the word "sea", most likely because they migrated to coastal areas after their inland tribes. Therefore, we can gather from this vocabulary study that they didn't live near salt water.

Big Idea #2: Repeated conquests of the British Isles changed and expanded the English language.

Nowadays, it's not uncommon to hear English words pop up in other European languages. But this wasn't always the case – historically, English was the main adopter of foreign words. There were a few major evolutionary points in the development of the language and one came when two Germanic tribes migrated to Britain.

The Angles, Saxons and Jutes were tribes who left their homes in northern Germany. They crossed the North Sea to Britain after the Romans had abandoned that area around 450 AD. The Celts had already been living there for a while, so they displaced them and began developing English as we know it today.

Then came the Viking invasion of 850 AD. It began when 350 Viking warships left Scandinavia and sailed up the river Thames. Thus began a battle that would rage for almost three decades, until the English finally settled things in 878 AD. Afterward, an area of Britain called the Danelaw was established to divide the nation between the southern English and the northern Vikings. This arrangement had lasting linguistic effects; Old Norse words were absorbed into English while some place names are still used today. Eventually, Old Norse and Old English merged into one language. Next came Norman rule by William I (the Conqueror) who invaded England in 1066 with over 10,000 French-derived words added to our vocabulary such as "painter," "tailor," etc., while Anglo-Saxon terms like "baker" remained for

labor jobs due to their lower class status during this period of time under Norman rule where there was a two-tiered society consisting of both French speakers and commoners who spoke only English at this time which eventually evolved into modern day England after 300 years under Norman control from 1066 - 1350 AD..

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