

A Study of French Loanwords Related to Cookery Used in the English Language

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Abstract

French has a rich vocabulary with a long history. Some French words are found as a loanword in the languages of the neighbouring countries as well as in the languages derived from Latin. This research paper is the study of French loanwords in English, of which are about food and beverage, approached with descriptive method. There are many French loanwords in English and this paper also explains the conditions leading to the transfer of loanword, their function and integration are studied in more details. The findings point out the historical reasons for the penetrating of French words into English.

Keywords: French loanwords, English, food, language history

Introduction

French is one of the most influential languages in the world. Since France and Britain are the neighbouring countries with good bilateral relations, their languages have a strong influence on one another. There are English loanwords in French. Likewise, many French loanwords are in active use in English. As the number of French loanwords in English is immense, the research deals with the process of borrowing from French through different time periods. Among the European countries, France is famous for its own culture such as fashion, food, art, literature, etc. and the words connected with these fields also penetrated to other languages. This research focuses on the field of cuisine which seemed to be the most enticing to explore. It examines the kinds of words adopted into particular times in the history and the reason of their borrowing. It also studied the status of French words in the English lexicon. The analysis part of the research provides an insight into the etymology of certain English words borrowed from French. Finally the research answers the question whether the French language still influences the English language and it deals with the French and English relationship, as it is seen nowadays.

Literature Review

French is a Romance language of the Indo-European family. It descended from the Vulgar Latin which was brought to Northern Gaul with the Roman conquest in the 1st century B.C. The history of French language is divided into six periods: Gallo-Romance (5th-8th centuries), Old French (9th-13th centuries), Middle French (14th -15th centuries), Early Modern French (16th century), Classical Modern French (17th-18th centuries) and Contemporary Modern French (since 19th century).

English is a West Germanic language, belonging to the Indo-European language family, which originated from the Anglo-Frisian dialects spoken by people formerly living in the area of what is nowadays northwest Germany and the Northern Netherlands. Defining periods of English has always been problematic as linguistic change is continuous and it is difficult to base it on linguistic criteria. There are always other factors that contribute to the change: cultural and political events, which help to define the periods. Historians usually divide history of

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English into the following periods: Old English (450/700-1100 AD), Middle English (1100-circa 1500 AD), Early Modern English (1500-1700 AD) and Modern English (after 1700 AD).

The language contact between French and English began in early 11th century. In 1002, Ethelred, king of England, married a Norman princess and sent his son, Edward, to school in France. When in 1042 Edward came to throne, he gave his Norman friends the chief positions in both church and government. During his reign a few French words entered the English language. (Rolf Berndt, *A History of the English Language*, 1982)

However, the greatest event in the English language was the Norman Conquest in 1066. William of Normandy defeated King Harold at the Battle of Hastings and became the ruler of England. The Anglo-Saxon nobles were replaced by a French-speaking aristocracy who regarded themselves as primarily Frenchmen. Norman-French became the official language of the country. For a time, Norman-French, spoken by the nobles, and English, spoken by the lower classes, existed side by side in the conquered land, without affecting each other.

However, since the two sections of the society could not live separately, and had some relations with each other, they gradually came to learn or understand the other language. The Englishman who associated with the governing class acquired a command of French. Knowing French and speaking was a mark of social distinction. On the other hand, since English was the language of the greater part of the population, many of the Frenchmen would acquire some familiarity with it. At the end of the twelfth century, knowledge of English was not uncommon among those who habitually used French.

The constant connection of England with France, which reinforced the use of French, was broken in 1204. The English kings lost Normandy. The loss of Normandy was advantageous to the English language, for it caused the upper classes to become bilingual. As we know, when a conquering race begins to be bilingual, their language is likely to be replaced with the language of the conquered race, and it is what happened in England. (Mary Sidney Serjeanston, *A History of Foreign Words in English*, 1935)

However, the decline of French as the predominant language of the ruling classes was hastened by the factor which was a new French invasion. The invasion began in the time of King John, whose wife was from France. In the time of his son, Henry III, great floods of Frenchmen poured into England. He dismissed all the native officers of his court and appointed foreigners in their places. Consequently, national feelings arouse among the people, the barons, the middle class and even those who were of foreign origin and who had lived in England for generations against the foreigners and their language.

At the end of the thirteenth century and especially in the course of the fourteenth century, French language gradually lost its influence on English. Different factors besides the loss of Normandy helped in the decline of French and re-establishment of English. (Dana Melzer, *French Influence on the English Language in the Middle English Period*, 2008)

Another factor was the hundred years' war, beginning in 1337, which made England and France bitter enemies. It further arouses the national feelings against the use of French. In 1362 Edward III set English as a language for proceedings in

courts but Latin and French were not completely eliminated at that time. It was in 1733 when Latin and French were prohibited in legal records. Sometimes, the French influence is called Norman only but there were two phases: the first was the influence of Normans, a Germanic tribe speaking a dialect of French and the second was Central French influence, which began with connection of English and French courts.

With the reference of the above data, the present paper attempts to explore the language history of French and English.

Aim

The aim of this study is to provide the Myanmar learners of French with some background knowledge about the influential nature of French on the other languages. This paper is also intended for learners of French as well as those of English who are interested in etymology and it is also hoped that it can be useful for further research on French words that have been used in English.

Materials and Method

The research is based on the descriptive method and sociolinguistic approach is used in this paper. The data were collected from required dictionaries and internet websites.

Research Questions

1. When did French loanwords influence the English language?
2. How did the French loanwords related to cookery penetrate into English?
3. Does the French language still influence the English language?

Discussion

Although there are hundreds of words borrowed from French in English, only a selection is given here. In the list below, every item of French loanwords has been collected and described by its current meaning and some features that help make the process of borrowing. There are three word classes represented by the items of the corpus: nouns, adjectives and verbs. Every item is also characterized by the chronological period of its transfer: Middle English, Early Modern English and Modern English and unspecified. There were no French loanwords related to cookery that would be transferred during the Old English period, but there are some loanwords that could not be clearly chronologically specified. The etymology suggested is taken from the Le Robert & CLE International French Dictionary, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Online Etymology Dictionary.

A Brief Etymologic Survey

1. *à la carte* (adj.) (ModE)¹ : (Explanation) if food in a restaurant is *à la carte*, or if you eat *à la carte*, you choose from a list of dishes that have separate prices, rather than having a complete meal at a fixed price
: (Original Form) 1826, from French *à la carte*, literally "by the card"

¹ Modern English

2. aperitif (n.) (ModE) : (Explanation) a drink, usually one containing alcohol that people sometimes have just before a meal
: (Original Form) “alcoholic drink taken before a meal to stimulate the appetite,” 1890, from French *aperitif* “laxative, laxative liqueur,” literally “opening,” from Latin *aperitivus*, from *aperire* “to open, uncover”
3. appetite (n.) (ME)¹ : (Explanation) physical desire for food
: (Original Form) c.1300, “craving for food,” from Anglo-French *appetit*, Old French *apetit* (Modern French *appétit*), from Latin *appetitus* “appetite, longing,” literally “desire toward”
4. baguette (n.) (EModE)² : (Explanation) a loaf of white bread in shape of a long thick stick that is crisp on the outside and soft inside, also French loaf
: (Original Form) from French *baguette* “a long thin loaf of French bread, a wand, rod, stick”
5. banquet (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a formal meal for a large number of people, usually for a special occasion, at which speeches are often made
: (Original Form) late 15c., from Old French *banquet* “feast”, earlier simply “small bench”
6. beef (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) meat that comes from a cow
: (Original Form) c.1300 from Old French *buf* (Modern French *bœuf*) “ox; beef; ox hide”
7. biscuit (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a small flat dry cake for one person, usually sweet, and baked until crisp
: (Original Form) 12c., from Old French *biscuit* “biscuit”, literally “twice-baked” based on Latin *bis-* twice+*coctus*, past participle of *coquere* to cook
8. buffet (n.) (EModE) : (Explanation) a meal at which people serves themselves from a table and then stand or sit somewhere else to eat
: (Original Form) from Old French *buffet* “stool, bench, sideboard”
9. cabbage (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a round vegetable with large green, purplish-red or white leaves that can be eaten raw or cooked

¹ Middle English

² Early Modern English

10. café (n.) (ModE) : (Original Form) mid-15c., from Old French *caboche* “head”, variant of Old French *caboce*
: (Explanation) a place where you can buy drinks and simple meals. Alcohol is not usually served in British and American cafes
: (Original Form) 1802, from French *café* “coffee of coffee house”
11. canteen (n.) (EModE) : (Explanation) a place where food and drink are served in a factory, a school, etc.
: (Original Form) from French *cantine* “sutler’s shop”, from Latin *canto* “corner for storage”
12. carrot (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a long pointed orange root vegetable
: (Original Form) c.1500, from French *carotte* “carrot”
13. cider (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) an alcoholic drink made from the juice of apples
: (Original Form) mid-14c., from Old French *cidre* “pear or apple cider”
14. confection (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a cake or other sweet food that looks very attractive
: (Original Form) mid-14c., via Old French *confeccion* (Modern French *confection*) “a making, a preparing”
15. cream (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a cake or other sweet food that looks very attractive
: (Original Form) mid-15c., from Old French *creme*, from a blend of Late Latin *cramum* (probably of Gaulish origin)
16. croissant (n.) (ModE) : (Explanation) a small sweet roll with curved shape, eaten especially at breakfast
: (Original Form) 1899, from Old French *creissant* (Modern French *croissant*) “crescent of the moon”
17. cuisine (n.) (EModE) : (Explanation) a style of cooking
: (Original Form) from French *cuisine*, literally “kitchen” from Latin *coquina*, from *coquere* “to cook”
18. cutlery (n.) (EModE) : (Explanation) knives, forks and spoons, used for eating and serving food
: (Original Form) from Old French *coutellerie* (Modern French *coutellerie*) “cutting utensils”
19. dinner (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) the main meal of the day

20. fruit (n.) (ME) : (Original Form) c.1300 from Old French *disner* (Modern French *dîner*) “to dine, eat, have a meal”
 : (Explanation) the part of a plant that consists of one or more seeds and flesh can be eaten as food and usually tastes sweet
 : (Original Form) late 12c., from Old French *fruit* “fruit eaten as a dessert” from Latin *fructus* “produce, fruit, crops”
21. fry (v.) (ME) : (Explanation) to cook something in hot fat or oil
 : (Original Form) late 13c., from Old French *frire* “to rub, spawn”
22. grain (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) the small hard seeds of food plants such as wheat, rice, etc.; a single seed of such a plant
 : (Original Form) early 14c., from Old French *grain*, (originally in the sense seed, grain of corn)
23. grill (v.) (EModE) : (Explanation) to cook food under or over a very strong heat
 : (Original Form) 1680s, from French *griller* from Old French *graille* “grill”
24. haute cuisine (n.) (nd)¹ : (Explanation) cooking of a very high standard
 : (Original Form) from French, literally high cookery
25. hors d'oeuvre (n.) (ModE) : (Explanation) a small amount of food, usually cold, served before the main part of a meal
 : (Original Form) 1714, from French *hors d'œuvre* “outside the ordinary courses (of a meal”, literally “apart from the main work”
26. juice (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) the liquid that comes from fruit or vegetables; a drink made from this
 : (Original Form) 1630s, via Old French *jus* “juice, sap, liquid”
27. lettuce (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a plant of large, green leaves, eaten raw in salads
 : (Original Form) from Old French *laitue* “lettuce”, from Latin *lactuca* from *lac* “milk” (because of its milky juice)
28. liqueur (n.) (ModE) : (Explanation) a strong sweet alcoholic drink, sometimes flavoured with fruit. It is usually drunk in very small glasses after a meal

¹ unspecified

29. mayonnaise (n.) (nd) : (Original Form) 1729, from French, *liqueur* “liquid, alcoholic beverage”
 : (Explanation) a thick cold white sauce made from eggs, oil and vinegar, used to add flavour to sandwiches, salads, etc.
 : (Original Form) from French *sauce mayonnaise*, probably from the feminine of *mahonnais* from Port Mahon, the capital of Minorca
30. menu (n.) (ModE) : (Explanation) a list of the food that is available at a restaurant or to be served at a meal
 : (Original Form) 1837, from French *menu* “small, detailed list” from Latin *minutus* very small
31. mousse (n.) (ModE) : (Explanation) a cold dessert (= a sweet dish) made with cream and egg, whites and flavoured with fruit, chocolate, etc.
 : (Original Form) 1892, from French *mousse*, “moss or froth”
32. mustard (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a thick cold yellow or brown sauce that tastes hot and spicy and is usually eaten with meat
 : (Original Form) late 13c., from Old French *moustarde* (Modern French *moutarde*) “mustard plant”
33. omelette (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a hot dish of eggs mixed together and fried, often with cheese, meat, vegetables, etc. added
 : (Original Form) from French *omelette* earlier *alemette*, from *alemele* “knife blade”, from Latin *lamella*, “thin plate”. The association with knife blade is probably because of the thin flat shape of an omelette
34. onion (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a round vegetable with many layers inside each other
 : (Original Form) early 12c., from Old French *oignon*, based on Latin *unio* (*n-*), denoting a kind of onion
35. orange (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a round citrus fruit with thick reddish yellow skin and a lot of sweet juice
 : (Original Form) c.1300, from Old French *orange* (Modern French *orange*)
36. oyster (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a large flat shellfish
 : (Original Form) early 14c., from Old French *oistre* (Modern French *huître*)

37. plate (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a flat, usually round, dish that you put food on
: (Original Form) late 14c., via Old French *plat* “flat, platter, large dish, dish of meat
38. pork (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) meat from a pig that has not been cured
: (Original Form) c.1300, from Old French *porc*, from Latin *porcus* pig
39. pullet (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a young chicken, especially one that is less than one year old
: (Original Form) late 14c., from Old French *poulet*, diminutive of *poule*
40. raisin (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a dried grape, used in cakes, etc.
: (Original Form) c.1300, from Old French *raisin* “grape”, from an alternation of Latin *racemus* grape bunch
41. restaurant (n.) (ModE) : (Explanation) a place where you can buy and eat a meal
: (Original Form) 1821, from French *restaurant* originally “food that restores”, from Old French *restaurer*
42. salad (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a mixture of raw vegetables such as lettuce, tomato and cucumber, usually served with other food as part of a meal
: (Original Form) late 14c., from Old French *salade*, based on Latin *sal* salt
43. salmon (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a large fish with silver skin and pink flesh that is used for food. Salmon live in the sea but swim up rivers to lay their eggs
: (Original Form) early 13c., from Old French *salmun*, (Modern French *saumon*)
44. sauce (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a thick liquid that is eaten with food to add flavour to it
: (Original Form) from Old French *sauce*, based on Latin *salsus* “salted” from *sal* salt
45. sausage (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a mixture of finely chopped meat, fat, bread, etc. in a long tube of skin, cooked and eaten whole or served cold in thin slices
: (Original Form) mid-15c., from Old Northern French *saussiche*, from Latin *salsus* “salted” from *sal* salt

46. serve (v.) (ME) : (Explanation) to give someone food or drink, for example at a restaurant or during a meal
: (Original Form) late 12c., from Old French *servir* “to do duty toward, set table, serve at table, offer, provide with”
47. soup (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a liquid food made by boiling meat, vegetables, etc. in water, often eaten as the first course of a meal
: (Original Form) from Old French *soupe* “sop, broth” (poured on slices of bread), from late Latin *suppa*, of Germanic origin
48. sugar (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a sweet substance, often in the form of white or brown crystals, made from the juices of various plants, used in cooking or to make tea, coffee, etc.
: (Original Form) early 15c., from Old French *sucre* “sugar”
49. supper (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) the last meal of the day, either a main meal, usually smaller and less formal than dinner, or a snack eaten before you go to bed
: (Original Form) mid-13c., from Old French *souper* “evening meal”
50. vinegar (n.) (ME) : (Explanation) a liquid with a bitter taste made from malt (= a type of grain) or wine, used to add flavour to food or to preserve it
: (Original Form) early 14c., from Old French *vinaigre* “vinegar”, from *vin* “wine” + *aigre* “sour”

Findings

The corpus contains 50 French loanwords related to cookery. The majority of items have their origin in the Middle English period, 68% of the items come from this era, and 12% from the period of Early Modern English, 16% of Modern English and 4% is unspecified. The fact shows that the largest number of French loanwords was borrowed during Middle English period. Although some words would have been borrowed from French even before A.D. 1066, the borrowing process of French words en masse broke out after the Norman Conquest. So the historical events which occurred in 11th century were undoubtedly the most significant ones for French-English language contact. The upper classes had set the standard in lifestyle trends, fashion and gastronomy, which is reflected by the number of French loanwords belonging to these fields. As the French loanwords reflect the cultural and political dominance of the French-speaking class in England that endured for about three centuries, many of the French words related to cuisine were adopted into English and still regarded as the centre of the world gastronomy. Although French commenced to die out in England gradually, the process of borrowing has not terminated. French also continues to influence the English vocabulary more heavily than any other living language, and it has

contributed hundreds of loanwords to present-day English due to geographical proximity of two countries. (Jackson and ZeAmvela, 2002)

Conclusion

The present study highlights the active loanwords of French in English. It observes how French loanwords in the English Language reflect the historical events and also the lifestyle of bilingual communities that were found among the higher classes of English society in Middle English era. English vocabulary in gastronomy was so extensive that it can be considered a partial replacement by French cuisine. There is no doubt that French language largely influenced English lexis in the field of cuisine. When compared to the enormous quantity of French words entering the English language in the past, only small number of French loanwords could be seen in English vocabulary nowadays. But French still remains one of the most influential languages in what concerns enriching English lexicon by loanwords. There are still other French loanwords for sports, politics, fashion, arts which are often used by English language speakers. Therefore, it would be wise to suggest those aspects of vocabulary as further research areas.

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