1 Words

The origins of English amongst the Germanic peoples of northern Europe, as described in the Prologue, explain why English is classified as a member of the Germanic language family and is, specifically, a West Germanic language. Much of its basic vocabulary is shared with the other West Germanic languages such as Dutch and German, including words for the numbers from one to a thousand; basic body parts like hand, arm, foot, finger, toe and eye; and the terms for the primary family relatives, father, mother, brother, sister, son and daughter – though the words uncle, aunt, nephew, niece and cousin are French in origin.

But of all the words in the Shorter Oxford Dictionary, only 27 per cent are Germanic in origin, and many hundreds of those are not West Germanic but North Germanic – Old Norse. Most of the rest, though by no means all, are from other European languages. Around 28 per cent of our English words come from French, with another 28 per cent derived from Latin; and a total of about 15 per cent are from Ancient Greek, Italian, Dutch and German.

Of course, these numbers apply to words as they appear in the dictionary, not to the vocabulary we actually use in our everyday lives: the majority of our most frequently used words, like the, and and but, come from West Germanic Old English stock, and most of the other words we utter over the course of a day are English in origin.

Latin vocabulary has been entering the English lexicon for many hundreds of years, starting with words for sophisticated portable items which the Romans had but we lacked, such as wine and tile. The influence of Latin as the international language of learning then continued for centuries, with English acquiring scores of words ranging from abdomen and arduous, to ubiquity and ulterior.

Ancient Greek, as we shall see in this chapter, has also provided us with a great deal of our learned vocabulary – amnesia, iconoclast, heptagon and sympathy are but a few examples – and numerous more ordinary words, such as athlete, energy and helicopter. As we shall also see, English has a number of Greek–Latin doublets such as sympathy–compassion, hypodermic–subcutaneous and synchronous–contemporary.

There are more than 1,500 words of Old Norse origin in Modern English (and more than that in the local dialects of the north and east of Britain). These include common everyday items like angry, egg, flat, gasp, get, guess, hit, ill, knife, leg, lift, low, same, sick, scare, take, tight and window – and, perhaps surprisingly, the pronouns they, their and them. Many Norse words actually replaced their Old
English equivalents: our original word for ‘egg’ was *ey* (the Modern Dutch word is *ei*). In some cases, though, we have retained words from both language sources, with a small difference in meaning. Doublets of this kind include Norse *skirt* alongside Old English *shirt*, and Norse *disk* versus English *dish*.

Very many of our French-origin words came into English via Norman French, after 1066. These were typically words having to do with government and war – the word *government* itself, *court*, *crown*, *state*; and *battle*, *enemy*, *lance* and *castle*. The Normans also introduced many religious words such as *faith*, *saint* and *mercy*, as well as vocabulary dealing with art and fashion: *beauty*, *figure*, *dress* and *garment*. Some Norman French words have become very much entrenched in our language as part of our normal way of speaking: *just*, *very*, *people*, *face*, *place*, *piece*, *easy*, *strange*. Sometimes Norman words did not replace English ones but relegated them to a more lowly or informal status, so we have pairs such as Norman *chair* versus English *stool*, *aid* versus *help*, *conceal* versus *hide*. Famously, the upper-class Normans also provided us with vocabulary for food such as *beef*, *pork*, *joint*, *cutlet*, *dinner* and *supper*, while we retained more proletarian English words like *oxtail*, *tongue*, *brains* and *breakfast*.

Sometimes we took a word from Norman French and then, later, also from Parisian French. The English language contains doublets such as Norman *warden* versus Parisian *guardian*, *catch* versus *chase*, *cattle* and *chattel*, *warranty* and *guarantee*, *reward* and *regard*. Parisian *guichet*, a word which came into English in the 1800s, refers to a hatch which tickets are issued through, but in origin it is the same word as the Norman-origin form *wicket*, which arrived in English in the early 1300s. More recent French imports include *brochure*, *baton*, *ballet*, *bizarre*, *brusque* and *beret*.

And we should not forget other less prominent European languages which have also contributed to our lexicon. Romani has given us the words *pal*, *cushy* and *lollipop*, amongst others. And Yiddish, the German-derived language of the East European Jews, has contributed items such as *glitch*, *nosh*, *schmaltz* and *schnozz*.

In this chapter, we look at only a very small selection, albeit hopefully a particularly interesting one, of English vocabulary items, as well as words from many other languages.

### 1.1 Manly, Male, Masculine, Macho

You sometimes hear it said that English has more words than other languages. But what does it imply for a language to ‘have’ a word? Is it enough for that word to exist in a dictionary somewhere? If so, English certainly does very well on the lots-of-words front: the *Oxford English Dictionary* contains over 600,000 words. But this is really due more than anything else to the diligence of the Oxford lexicographers, the length of time they have been working on the dictionary (over 160
years), and the time-depth of the forms of the English language they have been studying (going back well over 1,000 years).

It is safe to say, too, that very few native speakers of English actually know even a small percentage of that number of the words. Looking at a sequence of forty words beginning with B in the OED, I found that I had never heard of fifteen of them, even though I am perhaps professionally obliged to know more about words than most other people. No doubt some readers of the New European will know what baccated means – ‘berried, berry-bearing’ – but I most certainly did not.

It is true, though, that English has over the centuries borrowed very many words from other – mainly European – languages, and that as a consequence it seems to have quite a number of sets of near-synonyms which correspond to single words in other languages. The example which is always cited in student textbooks is the triplet formed by regal, royal and kingly. My German dictionary gives königlich as a possible translation for all of these, although there are other possible German words as well; and my French dictionary similarly comes up with royal for all three.

The three English words are not totally synonymous, although their meanings are, of course, closely related. Kingly is the original Germanic-origin form. It derives from Old English cyning, ‘king’, which has been part of our language ever since there was such a language. Kingly corresponds to German königlich, Dutch koninklijk and Swedish kunglig.

Royal came into English from outside the Germanic language family. It was borrowed from the Anglo-Norman tongue which arrived in England in 1066; the word is first attested in English from about 1400. Royal is the Old French descendant of the Latin word regalis, from rex, ‘king’, altered through processes of sound change over the centuries – the Catalan is reial and the Spanish real. But Old French also borrowed regalis directly from Latin in the form of regal, which was in its turn also borrowed into English.

The way the English language has expanded its European-origin vocabulary over the centuries gives us many other similar examples of near-synonyms. Male is the relatively neutral English word which does duty as the opposite of female – the OED has a very nice technical definition of male: ‘of the sex which can beget, but not bear, offspring’. Like royal, this word came originally from Latin (from masculus, ‘male’), but it was borrowed into English from the Anglo-Norman descendant of this Latin word, masle. Our word masculine, on the other hand, was taken into English directly from the Latin. It is a more semantically loaded word than male: English speakers are very aware of the difference between the meanings of maleness and masculinity. A perhaps even more loaded term is the word manly. This, like kingly, comes from our original native stock of Germanic words. German männlich simply means ‘male’, but manly means a lot more than just that. A related and even less neutral English word is macho, which did not enter into written (originally American) English to any extent until the 1960s, when it was borrowed from
Spanish, where it is simply a word meaning *male*. It, too, has its origin in the Latin word *masculus*.

The fact is that, while some of our compatriots may currently be trying to reject their European Union citizenship, they would find it impossible to reject their European vocabulary.

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<td>The original meaning of Old English <em>man</em> was ‘human being’ – which is why we also find this element in <em>woman</em>. The ancient word for ‘man’ was <em>wer</em>, with the same origin as Latin <em>vir</em>, ‘man’. We have now lost <em>wer</em>, except in <em>werewolf</em>, but we have borrowed the Latin equivalent in words like <em>virile</em> and <em>virility</em>.</td>
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### 1.2 Boys and Girls

Some categories of words seem to be much more stable over the centuries than others. The Germanic words for female and male offspring, *daughter* and *son*, have hardly changed over two millennia. English *daughter* corresponds to Scots, Frisian and Dutch *dochter*, German *Tochter*, Danish and Norwegian *datter*, Swedish *dotter*, Norwegian *dåtter*, Faroese and Icelandic *döttr*. Similarly, the equivalents of English *son* are Frisian *soan*, Dutch *zoon*, German *Sohn*, Danish *søn*, Norwegian *sønn*, Swedish *son* and Faroese and Icelandic *sonur*. Philologists agree that these words go back to ancient Germanic *duhter* and *sunuz*; and in fact they go back even further – something like 6,000 years – to ancient Indo-European *dhugheter* and *suhnu*.

Compare this with the numerous changes which have happened to our everyday words for young people generally. In English, the most common word for a young female human being is *girl*. But in the north of Britain *lass* and *lassie* are extremely common; and until relatively recently the East Anglian word was *mawther*, with *maid* and *wench* being normal in different parts of western England. The Frisian word for girl is *famke*, the Norwegian is *jente*, the Danish is *pige*, the Swedish *flicka* and the Icelandic *stelpa*. The Faroese genta does show a resemblance to the Norwegian; and we can see a relationship between *maid*, German *Mädchen* and Dutch *meisje*; but the variation is considerable compared to *daughter*.

The English word *girl* itself is rather tricky in other ways, too. It didn’t appear in English until about 1300, when it seems to have referred to both males and females. And nobody knows for sure where the word came from. Some experts think there may have been an Old English word *gyrela* meaning ‘dress’, in which case *girl* may represent a jocular usage, rather like the slang form *skirt* for ‘girl’. Others believe it was a late mediaeval borrowing from Low German *gör*, ‘small child’: there is
a Modern German word Göre which means ‘cheeky little girl’—but then there is the problem of where did the i come from?

There has also been some ideological discussion in recent decades in the English-speaking world about the usage of girl to refer to adults, the argument being that it is demeaning to refer to people over the age of majority by using a word for a child. In fact, the normal meaning of girl in most contexts in Modern English, as the Oxford English Dictionary states, is precisely that of ‘a young or relatively young woman’. A female child would most normally be referred to as a ‘little girl’, and a young teenager as a ‘young girl’. Most native English speakers, if told that a woman was coming to see them, would be rather surprised if, when she arrived, she turned out to be eighteen.

The English word boy shows an almost equally varied set of correspondences: dreng in Danish, gutt in Norwegian, pojke in Swedish, strákur in Icelandic—though admittedly Dutch jongen, Frisian jonge and German Junge present a more united front. The word boy, too, is mysterious; no one is very sure where it came from. Like girl, it arrived in English around 1300. Its original meaning was ‘male servant’, reminding us of French garçon meaning ‘boy’ but also ‘waiter’. Danish dreng also used to mean ‘servant’. There is a suggestion that boy came from Anglo-Norman emboyé, ‘in chains’, from Latin boia, ‘leg iron’, hence ‘slave, servant’. But it could have been borrowed from Frisian, Dutch or Low German. Nobody really knows.

So, while we are entirely sure about the origins of words like daughter and son which are thousands of years old, we are not at all sure about a couple of words which arrived only 600 years ago.

Why is this? Maybe words for boys and girls vary and change more than others because they so often originate in colloquial or humorous nicknames and endearments.

**KID**

The original meaning of kid was ‘a young goat’. It came into English from Old Norse. The related German Kitz most often means ‘fawn, young deer’, but can also be ‘young goat’. Kid started being used as a jocular word for a child in the sixteenth century, and became established as a common and increasingly less informal word during the 1800s.

1.3 Madam

It is often the fate of words and phrases, over the millennia, to get shorter and shorter. The Latin phrase hoc die, ‘this day’ famously became so shortened in French—as hui ‘today’—that French speakers increased its length again by saying au-jour-d’hui, literally ‘on the day of this day’. Modern French août, ‘August’,

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pronounced ‘oo’, comes from Latin *augustum*. English *going to* is now very often simply *gonna*. There used to be five separate sounds in *knight*: *k, n, i, h* and *t*, but now it only has three. *Or* is a reduced form of *other*, and *but* was originally *be-utan*. In Old English, *forty* was *feowertig*.

In some parts of the USA it is not altogether uncommon – or at least it used not to be – for people to respond to a question, request or instruction on the part of an adult female speaker by responding ‘*Yes’m!’ That ‘*m* is a short, weakened, unstressed form of *ma’am* – a word which you hear rather more frequently as a polite form of address in the USA than on this side of the Atlantic. (It can be very useful for attracting a woman’s attention if, say, you notice she has just dropped something. Over here we might find ourselves using rather more awkward strategies such as calling out ‘*Excuse me!’* or ‘*Hey!’*)

*Ma’am* seems to have first come into use in English in the late 1600s; it is in its turn an abbreviated form of *madam*, which until about 1600 had generally been spelt *madame* and was pronounced with the stress on the second syllable, ‘*ma-DAHM*’. This is what you might expect of a word borrowed from French, where stress, insofar as there is any at all, occurs on the last syllable – Americans still pronounce many French-origin words like *debris*, *ballet*, *garage* and *beret* with the stress at the end. The pronunciation of *madame*, however, was gradually anglicised to MADD’m, with the stress on the first syllable (the letter *e* was also generally dropped from the spelling). *Madam* then acquired the shortened form, *ma’am*, as a term of address.

The original French word which was the source of these forms had originally been two separate words: *ma dame*, meaning ‘my lady’. This is parallel to the Italian term *ma donna > madonna*. Both the French and the Italian forms are derived from the Latin *mea domina*, which had the same meaning. So in the American address-form ‘*m*’, all that remains of the nine vowels and consonants of the original Latin phrase *mea domina* is the second *m*-sound – a loss of 89 per cent!

The male equivalent of *madam* is, of course, *sir*. This has no connection with *dominus*, the masculine equivalent of *domina*, but is instead derived from Old French *sire*, which came from an earlier form *sieire*, from Late Spoken Latin *seior*. This was a reduced version of the Classical Latin adjective *senior*, ‘older, elder’, the comparative form of *senex*, ‘old’. We have since borrowed the words *senior* and *seniority* into English directly; *senex* is also the source of the words *senile*, *senility*, *senescent*, *senator* and *senate*.

The use of *senior* as a noun has also given us the well-known terms of respectful address used to men in the modern Romance languages, equivalent to *sir* or *Mr*: Portuguese *senhor*, Spanish *señor*, Catalan *senyor*, Italian *signor*. The *-sieur* part of the Modern French word *monsieur* has the same origin.

When I was at my all-male secondary school in the 1950s and ’60s, we were expected to address all our teachers as *sir*. We were so well trained in this that any
utterance which passed our lips when talking to a schoolmaster ended in this word, pronounced rapidly and in very reduced form. For us, all that was left of the original Latin word *senior* was the very brief syllable *suh*.

### SENATE

Deriving its name from the Latin word *senex*, ‘old’, the original Senate of Ancient Rome was the ‘council of old men’. The point was, of course, that age and wisdom went together. These days we can wonder how valid it still is to suppose that the US Senate is truly a ‘council of the wise’ as opposed to just the old.

### 1.4 Awesome

‘Cash or card?’ the boy at the checkout asked me. ‘Cash’, I said. ‘Awesome!’, he replied.

*Awesome* used to mean ‘inspiring a feeling of solemn and reverential wonder’. As employed by many English speakers today, however, its most usual meaning has been weakened to the extent that it can now simply mean something like ‘very good’. Certainly, most of the connections to the original meaning of *awe* have been lost. Most English speakers today would have to say *awe-inspiring* in order to recapture the original meaning of *awe-some*.

This kind of weakening is a fate which commonly befalls evaluative words: the more they are used, the less impact they make. *Awful* has gone through the same process. And if someone says my handwriting is *terrible*, that just means that they think it is not very legible, not that it inspires terror.

Historically, the *awe-* bit of *awesome* comes from ancient Germanic *agiz*, ‘fear’. But what about the *-some* part? This is also a very venerable part of our linguistic heritage: our ancestral Old English language had a suffix *-sum* which was used to form adjectives from nouns, verbs and other adjectives. Twelve hundred years ago, *langsum* meant ‘enduring’, and *hearsum* signified ‘obedient’. Old English *wynsum* still survives in Modern English as *winsome*, but rather few *-some* words in use today date from the Old English period. A number of modern words ending in *-some* have been around for quite a long time though: *loathsome* dates from 1200, and *wholesome* from the 1400s. And we have many other adjectives in Modern English which are formed with this suffix, ranging from *irksome, burdensome, loathsome, fearsome, wearisome, quarrelsome, meddlesome and bothersome* to *adventuresome, fulous* and *cuddlesome*. Large numbers of *-some* words have come and gone over the centuries – *friendsome, brightsome, darksome and lustsome* are no longer in use. Many Americans still say *lonesome*, while we normally prefer *lonely*.

Many *-some* words are fairly transparent in terms of their origins and meanings, such as *toothsome*, ‘tasty’, but a number of others have become somewhat disguised.
in the modern language. *Lissom* or *lissome* was originally *lithe-some*. *Cumbersome* comes from the mediaeval verb *to cumber*, while these days we usually say *encumber*. *Noisome* is derived from the archaic noun *noy*, ‘annoyance, trouble’. The obsolete verb *to grue*, which means ‘to dread, to shudder’, gave us *gruesome*. *Handsome* is now most usually applied to good-looking men, but originally it meant *hand-some*, ‘easy to handle’. *Buxom*, now most often an adjective applied to full-bosomed women, was originally *bucsum*, ‘bow-some, flexible, pliant’. It then gradually came to mean ‘agreeable, pleasant’, later ‘lively, cheerful’ and then ‘healthy, vigorous, well-favoured’, ending up as ‘plump and comely’. The German word corresponding to *buxom* is *biegsam*, ‘pliant’, from *biegen*, ‘to bend’.

The other Germanic languages all have a version of our -some suffix, but which forms it can be added to is rather unpredictable. English no longer has *langsum*, ‘long-some’, but the Dutch word *langzaam* means ‘slow’, and so does the German word *langsam*; the North Frisian version is *lungsoom* and the West Frisian *langsum*.

In English there is no word *helpsome*, but in Swedish we find *hjälpsam* and in Danish *hjælpsom*. English lacks *thanksome*, but Swedish has *tacksam*. West Frisian has the nice adjective *sjongsum*, ‘melodious’ – it is rather a pity we do not have the English equivalent *songsome*. *Awesome* itself seems not to have come into use until around 1600, and then to have lasted a good three-and-a-half centuries in its literal meaning before semantic weakening set in. The word started appearing in a watered-down sense – having little or nothing to do with *awe*, as in ‘she has an awesome memory’ – in the USA during the 1960s.

And the current more trivial usage of the word *awesome*, simply indicating enthusiasm or approval, first made an appearance in American English in the late 1970s: the *Oxford English Dictionary* quotes ‘Third Grade is awesome’ from the *New Yorker* magazine in 1983.

**BLEACHING**

Semantic bleaching, or weakening of meaning, is a process which commonly affects emotive words. In Modern English, *dreadful* no longer has very much connection with *dread*, and *horrible* has little to do with *horror*. *Wonderful* most often does not refer to experiencing a sense of wonder. And something that is *terrific* does not ‘cause terror’.

1.5 Cheap

The Dutch word for ‘to buy’ is *kopen*. The corresponding word in German is *kaufen*; and the West Frisian equivalent is *keapje*. All the Scandinavian languages also have a related form: Norwegian *kjøpe*, Danish *købe*, Swedish *köpa*, Icelandic *kaupa* and
Faroese keypa. So a form of this word is found in all of the languages English is most closely related to – but it is strangely absent from English itself.

Why is it that English so mysteriously lacks a kopen-type word? In fact English did have such a word, for many centuries, until it was gradually replaced by to buy. In Old English, the related verb-form was ceapian, ‘to bargain, to buy’. And there were also a number of other Old English words which were derived from it, such as ceapmann, later chapman, meaning a merchant or trader. We have now lost this word too, except that it does survive as a surname. Dutch has a similar surname, Koopman and German has Kaufmann.

Another related Old English word was ceping or cieping, which meant ‘market town’ – a place where one bargained for and bought things. There are still several places in England which have this element in their names: Chipping Ongar, Chipping Norton, Chipping Sodbury, Chipping Camden. There are a number of similar place names in other areas of the Germanic-speaking word, too, with the same origin. The Old Norse equivalent to cieping was kaupangr, and there was an important Viking Age trading town on the south coast of Norway which was called Kaupang. In modern Sweden there are towns called Linköping, Nyköping and Norrköping which contain this same element. And in Denmark we find Ringkøbing, Nykøbing and Sakskøbing. The Nordic word has also been borrowed into Finnish as kaupunki, where it signifies ‘town’.

Back in this country, we can see the Old English verb cropping up in the name of Cheapside, which was the main shopping street in the old City of London, as well as in Eastcheap, also an ancient London commercial street. And the name of Chipstead in Kent comes from Old English ceap-stede, ‘buying place’.

By the mediaeval English period, the verb ceapian had become chepen. In Chaucer’s Wife of Bath’s Tale, we find the sentence ‘For as a spanyel she wol on hym lepe, Til that she fynde som man hire to chepe’ (‘For like a spaniel she will leap on him, Until she finds some man to buy her’). Chepe(n), ‘to buy, bargain’ continued to be used in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but then it gradually died out.

Except that it did not really die out at all. The word survives today in the form of our modern adjective cheap. The way we use the word nowadays is actually comparatively recent, not becoming current until the 1500s. It was originally an abbreviation of the phrase ‘good cheap’, where cheap was a noun derived from chepen meaning ‘a bargain, commodity’. If something was ‘good cheap’, then that meant that it was a good bargain, that you got it at a good price.

So the ancient pan-Germanic word does survive in English, just not as a verb as it does in our sister languages. But we can now ask how long even this adjective is going to survive. It already seems that quite a lot of Americans do not like this word: it is noticeable that there is a strong tendency for many of them to prefer to say inexpensive rather than cheap. What seems to be going on is that cheap has acquired too many negative connotations in American English of the ‘cheap-and-
nasty’ type for speakers to feel comfortable about using it in a neutral way in the original sense ‘of good value in proportion to its price’. And there are also other associated negative usages such as cheap trick and cheapskate which may in the end send the adjective cheap along the same road into linguistic oblivion that the verb to cheap has already travelled.

ONGAR

Ongar strikes many people as being a rather unusual name, and it does seem to be the only place-name in Britain with a name beginning with Ong-. Actually, though, it is a perfectly good English-language name which is derived from the Old English word angr which meant ‘meadow’ or ‘grazing land’.

1.6 Time and Tide

In English, when we speak about the approximately twice-a-day rising and falling of the seas along our shores, we talk of high tides and low tides. Norwegian uses similar terminology: høgvatn, ‘high water’ and lågvatn, ‘low water’, as does Afrikaans: hoogwater and laagwater.

But German has two entirely different words which can be used for these tidal phenomena: high tide is Flut, while low tide is Ebbe. These lexical items are instantly recognisable to English speakers as being related to our words flood and ebb. Flood itself is related to flow – and of course we do talk about the ‘ebb and flow’ of the sea, as well as, metaphorically, of human fortunes.

The complex nature of the historical relationships between the different languages of the Germanic family can further be seen in the way that our word tide is in origin the same word as German Zeit, Dutch tijd, West Frisian tiid and Norwegian, Swedish and Danish tid. However, in all of those languages, these words do not actually mean ‘tide’, but rather ‘time’. This is not particularly mysterious: high and low tides occur at more or less predictable times, even if this involves somewhat complex calculations – tides are dependent on the phases of the moon, and are therefore in principle known in advance indefinitely.

The English word time, on the other hand, clearly has the same origin as Norwegian and Danish time (pronounced as two syllables, ‘teem-uh’), Swedish timme, and Faroese timi. But in these Scandinavian languages, the words do not mean ‘time’ but rather ‘hour’ – a period of 60 minutes – or in an educational context ‘lesson’, because traditionally lessons lasted for an hour.

If we now look more closely at our English word hour, it turns out that it has the same origin as French heure and Greek ora, ‘hour, time’, but it also corresponds to German Uhr and Scandinavian ur. However, these last two words do not mean
‘hour’ or ‘time’, but ‘clock’. Again, you can see how that came about – we look at clocks in order to see what time or ‘hour’ it is.

Following the thread along from there, English *clock* is related to the Norwegian word *klokke*, Swedish *klocka* and Faroese *klokka*, with the corresponding German form being *Glocke* – but these words all mean ‘bell’. Many people will know that a *glockenspiel* (literally a ‘bell-play’) is a musical instrument which resembles a xylophone, but with keys that are made of metal rather than wood so that it sounds like bells are being struck. Once again, we can see how this semantic change could have arisen: clocks very often had bells which sounded to mark the hour.

English *clock* was actually originally borrowed either from Dutch *klok*, ‘clock, bell’ or from French *cloche*, ‘bell’. We have also borrowed *cloche* more directly into Modern English in the sense of, originally, a kind of bell-shaped glass jar used for rearing young plants and, more recently, any rigid, translucent cover that protects plants from the cold. We also use the term *cloche hat* to refer to a woman’s hat that is close-fitting and shaped like a bell.

The Modern English word *bell* itself comes down to us from Old English *belle*, which was related to mediaeval Dutch and Low German *belle*, with the same meaning. But no related word can be found in German, and Scandinavian forms such as Norwegian *bjelle*, Danish *bjælde* and Icelandic *bjalla* seem to have been borrowed from an older form of English. The origin of *bell* may well lie in the Old English verb *bellan*, ‘to roar, make a loud vocal noise’, which would provide a link to *bellow*; German *bellen* does mean ‘to bark’, as of a dog.

It is a very long way, in terms of meaning, from ‘ebbing and flowing’ to ‘barking’, but these are the sorts of lengthy journeys that etymological research into words with related meanings can take us on.

### BELLOWS

The word *bellows*, referring to a device for blasting air onto a fire, has nothing to do with bellowing in the sense of shouting loudly. It has a closer connection to the word *belly*. Both of these forms appear to be related to the Old English word *belig*, which meant ‘bag, sack, container’.

#### 1.7 Feet and Inches

Of the approximately eighty countries in the world which drive on the left-hand side of the road, only four are European: Ireland, Malta, Cyprus and the UK (plus the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands). This is due in some measure to Napoleon, Hitler and other despots.
There is no particular reason why driving on the right or left should be preferred, so we would expect to find something like a 50–50 distribution of driving on the right versus the left in Europe. In fact, there were originally probably more polities travelling on the left than on the right. Napoleon’s conquests, however, resulted in French-style driving on the right being imposed in Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Switzerland and much of Spain and Italy. Those places which drove on the left and were not conquered by Napoleon, such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire, mostly retained their original system, but Tsar Alexander II of Russia then forced driving on the right in Finland, while later on Hitler did the same thing elsewhere, including in Austria and Czechoslovakia. As time has gone by, other nations that drove on the left, finding themselves in the minority, changed voluntarily, most recently Iceland and Sweden.

Something not totally dissimilar happened with European systems of measurement. Because Britain was not conquered by Napoleon, we could choose to stay with the same natural Germanic measurement system which had served us well for a millennium or two. Our anatomical word foot comes from Anglo-Saxon fot and is related to Norwegian and Swedish fot, Danish fod, Dutch voet, West Frisian foet, North Frisian fötj, German Fuss and Low German foot. But a foot is also, of course, an ancient unit of measurement, based on the length of the foot of a typical adult male. The word first appeared in this usage in written English 1,100 years ago.

An inch is often taken to be equivalent to the width of a man’s thumb. The French word pouce, ‘thumb’, also means ‘inch’, as does Italian pollice. In Hungarian, hüvelyk means both ‘inch’ and ‘thumb’, but ‘thumb’ can also be hüvelykujj, ‘inch-finger’. Romanian deget means both ‘finger’ and ‘inch’.

Another natural unit of measurement is the fathom, which was originally the length of the outstretched arms from fingertip to fingertip. A fathom is equivalent to six feet, and these days it is mostly used in measuring the depth of water. It, too, is an old Germanic word and is related to Modern Swedish famn and Danish favn, which mean ‘embrace’ as well as ‘fathom’ – if you are going to embrace somebody, you do start with your arms stretched out.

In Western Europe, natural measurements of this type started disappearing in those countries which had fallen to Napoleon, being officially replaced by the new, more logical French metric system. But even in many of those nations, the foot, inch and fathom still survive as units of measurement today, more than 200 years later. Scandinavian carpenters can still talk in thumbs or inches. In Norway, the length of a boat is always still quoted in feet. And in Sweden, the depth of the sea is often measured in fathoms. Internationally, too, it is still widespread practice to give the flying height of aeroplanes in feet. It is the intuitive naturalness of measurements like inch, foot and fathom which make them hard to get rid of. We like them because we can relate to them.

Some while ago I was in a stationery shop looking for plastic folders. The young assistant showed me what they had and, wanting to know if they were the right
size, I asked how many inches across they were. She said: ‘I don’t know anything about feet and inches’ and gave me the dimensions in centimetres. Later on, as I was leaving the shop, I asked her how tall she was. ‘Five foot seven’, she replied.

### ELL

The ell was a traditional measurement of length, originally representing 45 inches. The word has the same linguistic origin as Latin *ulna*, which meant ‘forearm’; it was intended to represent the length of a man’s arm from the elbow to the wrist. *Elbow* itself is derived from *ell*, plus *bow* in the sense of ‘bend’.

### 1.8 Colours

Some English words for colours are obviously derived from the names of objects and substances. The most obvious case is *orange*, which clearly comes from the name of the fruit. *Orange* is a rather important English colour term nowadays, which is interesting when you consider that oranges do not naturally grow in Britain, and that the first written mention of the fruit in English does not appear until about 1400. In fact, its first recorded use as a colour term dates from 1557 – which raises the interesting question of what the colour we now call *orange* used to be called before that. The answer is: *red or yellow* – which must mean that these two words used to cover a wider range of hues than they do now.

English has many other secondary colour words which also originate in the hue of objects: for example, *plum, amber, cream, gold* . . . Modern manufacturers of paints and clothing have become very creative with such terminology. But surely our more commonly used colour terms did not arise in this same way? Well, some of them did. *Purple* (earlier *purpure*) came from Latin *purpura*, from Greek *porphýra*, which was the name of the Mediterranean sea snail which purple dye was originally obtained from. The word may have come originally from Phoenician.

*Pink* as a colour term is even newer than *orange*, dating from 1669. It too is derived from a word for an object – in this case the flower of the same name. But that raises the question as to the origin of the name of the flower. The disappointing answer is that nobody is very sure about that.

Another possible example is *black*, which is derived from the same source as mediaeval Dutch *blac*, Low German *blak* and Modern Norwegian *blekk* – which all mean ‘ink’. But which came first, the name of the colour or the name of the substance? Actually, it seems most likely that the continental words for ‘ink’ were borrowed from the Old English colour word *blæc*. But where did *blæc* come from? We do not really know, but there is a Dutch word *blaken*, ‘to blaze’, so black
might derive from a word meaning ‘burnt’. The Modern German, Dutch and Swedish words for ‘black’ are respectively *schwarz*, *zwart* and *svart*, which are the same word in origin as English *swarthy*, and go back to a root meaning ‘dark’.

Interestingly, a number of other colour terms come from ancient verb forms rather than the names of substances. *Yellow* has the same origin as Frisian *giel*, Dutch *geel* and German *gelb*, ‘yellow’, but the ultimate source seems to be an ancient Indo-European root meaning ‘to shine’; our word *gold* comes from the same source.

*Green*, too, is a shared Germanic word – compare Frisian *grien*, Dutch *groen*, German *grün*, Danish *grøn*. This goes back to the same Germanic root which gave us our verb *grow*; a related word is *grass* – after all, grass is green, and it does grow.

The Germanic languages also derive their words for ‘white’ from a common root. *White* has the same origin as the word *wheat*, possibly because of the colour of the flour produced from this grain. Words for ‘white’ and ‘wheat’ respectively in other Germanic languages which show this relationship include Frisian *wyt* and *weet*, Dutch *wit* and *weit*, German *weiss* and *Weizen*, and Norwegian *hvit* and *hvete*. The ultimate source of *white* is probably an Indo-European root meaning ‘to be bright’.

*Red* is an exception to these patterns. Once again the Germanic languages have a shared word for this colour term: Frisian *read*, Dutch *rood*, German *rot*, Norwegian *rød*. But more interesting is the fact that these derive from the ancient Indo-European form *reudh*– ‘red’. This was also the source for our words *ruddy*, *rust*, *rufous* and *ruby*. Surprisingly, it is the only common ancient Indo-European colour word we know of.

### PHOENICIAN

Phoenician was a Semitic language which was originally spoken in the area which is modern Lebanon. The colonial dialect of Phoenician which was spoken in ancient Carthage, in North Africa – by Hannibal, for example – was known as Punic. We do not know a great deal about Punic, but we do know that Ancient Hebrew and Phoenician were closely related languages.

### 1.9 Orangemen

The Democratic Unionist Party are having difficulty coming to terms with the official use in Ulster of Irish Gaelic, the indigenous Celtic language of Ireland.

They also have a predilection for the colour orange. Belfast is a long way from Andhra Pradesh, but the Indian subcontinent is where we need to start if we want to explain the attraction this colour has for certain Irish Protestants.

Oranges seem to have originated in South East Asia. Our Modern English word *orange* probably goes back very many centuries to one of the Dravidian languages
of southern India such as Tamil or Telugu: the Modern Telugu word for orange is narinja. The ancient Dravidian word for this fruit eventually made its way north into the classical North Indian language Sanskrit as naranga. It then was carried across the mountains of the Hindu Kush into Persian as narang, and from there it crossed into Arabic in the form of naranj.

Oranges were probably first introduced into Europe by Portuguese traders – the Greek word for orange is portokali – but English speakers most likely acquired the word for the fruit via the language of the maritime Venetians, who called it naranza, or the Spanish, where it was naranja. The word then was taken north into France, where it passed into French as orange: the initial n went missing as a result of une norange being re-interpreted by speakers as une orange.

Some time around 1400, orange came into the English language from French, having of course made the 5,000-mile journey from southern Asia to our island along with the fruit itself.

The first known usage of the word as the name of a colour dates to the 1550s. Prior to the arrival of oranges on these shores, the colour was most often regarded as a kind of red: the ‘red’ breast of the European robin is often actually closer in hue to what English speakers these days would most likely label ‘orange’ in other contexts.

Orange is also the name of a town in the Vaucluse, in southern France. The town was the centre of a principality that in the sixteenth century passed into the ownership of a branch of the Dutch aristocratic dynasty, the House of Nassau, which led to this particular branch of the family being known as the House of Orange.

In the following century, the Dutch aristocrat William of Orange married Mary Stuart, the Protestant daughter of James II & VII, the Catholic King of England, Ireland and Scotland. After James was deposed in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, William and Mary became joint monarchs of the three kingdoms. James then attempted to regain his crown by raising an army in Ireland, but the victory of William’s army over James’s forces at the Battle of the Boyne in northern Ireland in 1690 established William as a champion of the Protestants. This led to the name Orangemen being used to refer to members of anti-Catholic groups in the north of Ireland who regarded him as a hero. They also came to adopt the colour orange as a symbol of their group membership; the tricolour flag of modern Ireland has one of its vertical stripes in orange to represent the Protestant section of the island’s population.

But it is a complete and utter coincidence that the English-language word for the colour (and the fruit) and the name of the town in southern France just happen to be identical.

And there is also an irony here which anti-Gaelic-language members of the DUP may not be aware of. It is true that the originally Dravidian word for the citrus fruit came into English via French. But the original Latin word which the name of the
French town of Orange descends from, *Arausio*, came into Latin from ancient Celtic, where it was the name of a Celtic water-god.

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**CHINESE APPLE**

The Low German word for ‘orange’ is *Appelsien*. High German speakers in northern Germany say *Apfelsine* (other German speakers have *Orange*). The Low German word spread into Danish and Norwegian, where it is *applesin*. In Icelandic it appears as *appelsína*, in Faroese *appilsin* and Swedish *apelsin*. These words recognise the Asian origins of the fruit: literally they mean ‘apple (from) China’.

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### 1.10 Denim

The sad Iraqi city of Mosul, or what is left of it, has been very much in the news. Thousands of its inhabitants have been killed, wounded or displaced; and there has been much anguish over the preservation of its architectural splendours. It is not very widely recognised, though – and this will be absolutely no consolation – that the name of the city is preserved in the English language in the shape of our word for the fabric *muslin*. We acquired this word in the seventeenth century from French *mousseline*, which had come into French from Italian *mussolo*, ‘muslin’, or more accurately from *mussolina*, ‘made from muslin’. This term was derived from the name of the city where muslin was originally made, most likely in its Kurdish form Musil, though possibly also Arabic Mawsil.

Many English-language names for fabrics are derived from Middle Eastern or Far Eastern languages. *Taffeta* comes from Persian *taftah*; and the origin of *cotton* lies in Arabic *qutn*. And a number of these fabric names, like *muslin*, come from the names of Eastern cities which were renowned for the manufacture of that particular cloth. *Damask* comes from Damascus. *Satin* may be derived, via Arabic, from Zaitun, the name of an ancient city in southern China. *Calico* is from Calicut, an Indian city on the coast of Kerala (known in Keralesse as Kozhikode).

But there are a small number of fabrics whose English names derive from European locations. The most famous of these is perhaps *denim*, which is a kind of serge. (The word *serge* itself supposedly comes from the name of the Seres, an ancient Far Eastern people.) The source of the word *denim* lies in the French city of Nîmes, which the fabric was originally associated with: the material was originally known as *serge de Nîmes*. An edition of the *London Gazette* from 1703 mentions ‘a pair of Serge de Nim breeches’.

Another fabric for which we can claim a European place-name origin is *cambric*, named after Cambrai in north-eastern France – its Dutch name is Kamerijk. And *lisle*
comes from the name of the nearby French city of Lille, earlier spelt Lisle. The town was originally Dutch speaking, and its Dutch name is Rijsel, from ter ijsel, ‘at the island’. The French name has the same kind of origin: it comes from l’isle, ‘the island’, hence the earlier spelling.

There is also one well-known fabric name which has a British topographical origin. This is worsted (pronounced ‘woosted’), named after the Norfolk village of Worstead (pronounced in the same way), which is located to the north-east of Norwich near Aylsham and North Walsham, which were also both associated with the manufacture of this type of cloth.

It is widely believed that the name nylon, too, was derived in part from a British place-name. There is a story that the term was created from the initial letters of New York, plus the first syllable of London – but that is not true. The word was invented out of the blue by the Du Pont company, which manufactured the material; they decided to create a name ending in -on based on the pattern of cotton and rayon.

The other fabric which we might want to claim a British place-name origin for – this time Scottish rather than English – is tweed. After all, the River Tweed does form the historical boundary between Scotland and England, and tweed fabric is famously associated with Scotland. Once again, however, this explanation is not correct. A clue to this being a misconception is the fact that one of the most famous cloths of this type is Harris Tweed, from the Outer Hebridean islands – which are nowhere near the River Tweed.

The truth of the matter is that the fabric name tweed was a mistake, a cross-linguistic misunderstanding. The Scots word corresponding to English twill is tweel. Some time around 1830, a London-based merchant, not being familiar with the Scots form, misread tweel as tweed, no doubt influenced by the name of the river, and put in an order for . . . tweed.

1.11 Foxglove

It is not a totally straightforward matter to explain how the flower we call the foxglove got its name. We can, however, at least figure out where the glove part comes from: the flowers look like the fingers of gloves, and small fingers, as children know, can be inserted into them.

In many languages, there is a more direct link between the plant’s name and the word for ‘finger’. In Greek, one name for the foxglove is daktylis, from dáchtilo, ‘finger’. The Spanish is dedalera, from dedo, ‘finger’ (the Portuguese is dedaleira, the Catalan didalera). In Albanian the name is lule gishti, with lule meaning ‘flower’ and gisht ‘finger’. The Latin name of the plant is digitalis – the Modern Italian is digitale. This name is now most frequently used to refer to the important heart drug which is derived from the foxglove, but digitalis originally meant ‘a finger width’, from digitus, ‘finger’. We have borrowed this word, in the form of digit, into Modern
English, where it has come to mean not only ‘finger’ but ‘a whole number less than ten’, presumably because of our ten anatomical digits. And of course these days we most often hear the word digital – as opposed to analogue – in connection with ‘the usage of numerical digits in electronics’.

Other languages have been a little more imaginative in developing their words for Digitalis purpurea and related flowers. The Polish for foxglove is naparstnica, from naparstek (na+parst is ‘on+finger’). Hungarian gyűszűvirág also means ‘thimble flower’. The Dutch word vingerhoedskruid literally means ‘finger hat (= thimble) herb’; and German Fingerhut, ‘finger hat’ signifies both a thimble and a foxglove. The Finnish for foxglove is sormustinkukkai, ‘thimble flower’, and Swedish fingerborgsblomma has the same meaning, with fingerborg literally meaning ‘finger castle’.

These continental thimble terms all relate in a rather transparent way to the covering or protecting of fingers. But English thimble – an Old English word, first recorded around AD 1000 – is historically derived from thumb, even though people who use thimbles when sewing more often than not put them on their index finger rather than their thumb.

Some other languages’ words for foxgloves are enjoyably more whimsical than those relating rather prosaically to fingers and thimbles. For example, another Greek word for foxglove is chelidonó-horto, ‘swallow plant’: there was apparently an ancient belief that the flowers bloomed when the swallows arrived from the south and withered away again when these birds departed for the winter. (It seems, though, that this Greek term is more often used with reference to the flowers we call celandines – an English name which is itself ultimately derived from Greek chelidon, ‘swallow’.)

Even more delightful is the Scottish Gaelic word for foxglove, lus nam ban-sìth: lus means ‘plant’ and a ban-sìth is ‘female fairy’, so it means ‘the fairy women’s plant’. (Many people will know ban-sìth in its anglicised form, banshee.) Then there is the lovely Welsh flower-name bysedd y cŵn, ‘dog-fingers’. Dogs do not have fingers, of course, but then neither do foxes.

Which brings us back to the mystery of the origins of the English word. We can understand the ‘glove’ element in foxglove. But why would anybody think that the flower had anything to do with foxes? And we really are talking about foxes here – there is no distortion of some other word involved: our Anglo-Saxon forebears actually did call the flower foxes glófa. Did this have something to do with the colour of the flowers, or the fact that foxgloves grew in wooded areas that foxes frequent? Or did our English ancestors fantasise that small foxes went around sticking their paws into digitalis flowers? If so, they seem not to have been alone in being fanciful about foxes. Some of our Scandinavian cousins must have had the same kind of flights of fancy: the Norwegian word for foxglove is revebjelle, ‘fox bell’.
**DACTYL**

*Pterodactyl* comes from classical Greek *pterón*, ‘wing’, and *dáktylos*, ‘finger’. Humans are *pentadactylous* (five-fingered). *Dactyloscopy* is the study of fingerprints. In poetry, a *dactyl* is a metrical foot consisting of an accented syllable followed by two unaccented ones (fingers have one long joint and two shorter ones!); an example is the word *strawberry*.

### 1.12 Passengers

The word *passenger* has been part of our normal English vocabulary for 700 years or so, and it has been the usual term for ‘a person in or on a conveyance, other than its driver, pilot, or crew’ for at least five centuries. Now this word is under attack. In many parts of the anglophone world, nobody is any longer officially a passenger, unless perhaps when on a ferry. British railway companies these days have ‘customers’, as do many airlines (although the Virgin Australia airline now addresses its passengers as ‘guests’, which is rather galling when you have paid them large sums of money for your ticket).

Of course, everybody still normally says ‘passengers’. Anybody who has grown up speaking English knows very well that people travelling on trains and buses are not customers but passengers. It is a fact about the English language that *customer* does not mean ‘a person in or on a conveyance other than its driver, pilot, or crew’. This knowledge is naturally also shared by railway and airline company employees: if you overhear them talking to each other, or if they are chatting informally to you, they also always quite naturally use the word *passenger*. But they have clearly had strict instructions from their bosses to avoid this word, and nearly all airline and rail notices, printed materials and public announcements eschew it.

There are several disadvantages resulting from the fact that the United Kingdom is a predominantly English-speaking nation. One of them is that we are much more open to cultural and linguistic influences from the USA than most other European countries. (I would not be at all surprised if there were rather few high-school proms in Kazakhstan; and I suspect that Halloween, American style, may not be too big in Azerbaijan.) The attempted extermination of *passenger* on the part of airline and railway companies is part of this picture: American business-school-speak does not like the word. Business-school ideology holds that the capitalist free market solves all problems, and that everything which can be marketised therefore should be marketised. Even some patients these days are being referred to as ‘customers’, which sounds especially bad to those of us who are used to healthcare being free at the point of delivery.

Non-anglophone European countries seem to be linguistically less exposed to American marketisation ideology. France and French-speaking Switzerland
continue to have *passengers*. In Athens, metro users are still addressed as *agapití epivátes*, ‘dear passengers’; in Serbia, railway travellers are referred to as *putnici*, ‘passengers’; and in Poland you are a *pasażer* or a *podróżny*, ‘traveller’, not a *klient*, ‘customer’. Hungarian is also totally resistant to US business-school-speak in this context: the home page of the Hungarian airline WizzAir has over thirty instances of the word *utas*, ‘passenger’ and none at all of the equivalent of *customer*. The Danish railway company DSB still normally uses *passager* rather than *kunde*, ‘customer’; and *Kunde*, ‘customer’, is not used by German or Austrian railways to refer to people who are actually travelling, although there is a venerable German word *Fahrgast*, ‘travel guest’.

English-speaking travellers, however, are not totally alone in suffering from this attack by business-speak. In Spain, the word *clientes*, ‘customers’, is now found alongside *pasageros*; and in Italian, while *passeggeri* is more common than *clienti*, the latter can now be encountered.

A Finnish traveller may now also be called *asiakas*, ‘customer’, but the word for ‘passenger’, *matkustaja*, is still alive and well in Finland. It comes from the verb *matkustaa*, ‘to travel’, and will therefore be difficult for free-market-oriented corporations to abolish, not least because of other words related to it: *matkustus* means ‘journey’, and the word for ‘cabin’ is *matkustamo*, literally ‘place for travelling’. A business-speak translation of ‘cabin’ as a ‘place for being a customer’ will hopefully seem a step too far even for avid business-school-speak devotees.

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<td><em>Custom</em> and <em>costume</em> were in origin the same word, both deriving from Latin <em>consuetudo</em>, ‘habit’. <em>Costume</em> referred to clothing which it was customary to wear. The same kind of semantic link can be seen in the case of <em>habit</em>, which means both ‘clothing, dress’, and ‘tendency to act in a certain way’.</td>
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### 1.13 Manure

English speakers know very well what the word *opera* means: an opera is a dramatic, classical-music composition involving singing – Bizet’s *Carmen*, Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro*, Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*. The word *opera* was borrowed into English from Italian, but if we go back far enough in time we can see that the word was originally Latin, and that it was originally plural. Latin *opus* meant ‘work’, and so its plural, *opera*, meant ‘works’. It came to have its seventeenth-century Italian meaning of ‘musical drama’ through a series of semantic shifts, starting with significations such as ‘works produced’ and continuing on to meanings such as ‘musical work produced’.

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The original Latin singular, *opus*, is used in Modern English to refer to a musical composition which is numbered according to a catalogue which has been compiled of a composer’s works. It is also used to mean a book or some other artistic or scientific work, particularly if it is considered to be important. A magnum opus is a great work or, to use the French term, a *chef-d’œuvre*.

But Latin *opera* has also found its way into English in ways which are rather less obvious. The word *manoeuvre*, for instance, was borrowed into English from French. (In American English it is most often spelt *maneuver.*) It derives from Late Latin *manuopera*, and so ultimately from classical Latin *manus*, ‘hand’, and *opera*, ‘works’ — so it actually meant ‘manual labour’. The word later acquired various other meanings, including ‘control with the hands’, as in the manoeuvring of a boat, which may be how it came to apply to naval exercises, and hence perhaps to military exercises in general. The modern military usage of the term *manoeuvre* did not become current in English until the 1700s. The word has also found its way into many other languages — in Spanish it is *maniobra*, the Portuguese version is *manovra*, the Italian is *manovra*, in Polish it is *manewr* and in Croatian *manevar*.

It is a bit of a surprise, however, to discover that *manoeuvre* has a twin in the form of *manure* — the two words have exactly the same origin. Admittedly, *manoeuvre* and *manure* look rather alike on the page, and the older pronunciation of *manoeuvre*, ‘man-yoover’, made them sound more alike than they do today for most speakers. But how can a word meaning ‘the planned movement of troops and military vehicles’ have the same origin as a word meaning ‘dung, excrement, or compost spread over soil in order to fertilise it’?

The answer is partly connected to the fact that while Late Latin *opera* came to be *oeuvre* in the mediaeval French of Paris, in the Anglo-Norman French of mediaeval England it became *eure*, with the loss of the *v*-sound. This version survived in English until the eighteenth century in the form of *ure*. The sixteenth-century poet Thomas Wyatt wrote: ‘Truth is trayed [betrayed] where craft is in *ure*, that is, ‘… where guile is at work’. Correspondingly, Late Latin *manuopera* became *maneure* in Anglo-Norman.

By the fifteenth century, Anglo-Norman *maneure* ‘work with the hands’ had become an English word signifying ‘cultivation of the land’. It can be seen in this sense in Milton, who used the word figuratively with the meaning ‘to cultivate the mind’, as in ‘it is the inward calling of God that makes a Minister, and it is his own painful study and diligence that manures and improves his ministerial gifts’ (and not, the Puritan Milton implies, the laying on of hands by some bishop).

The literal sense of ‘cultivating the earth’ then gradually came to mean ‘putting dung on soil to fertilise it’. And then, later on, the label *manure* was transferred to the dung itself, so long as it was being used as a fertiliser. Today, no one would consider *manoeuvre* and *manure* to be the same word, but the fact is that they do come from one and the same Latin phrase.
NUPTIALS

The Italian title of Mozart’s comic opera is *Le nozze di Figaro*. It might seem strange to English speakers that *nozze*, ‘marriage’, is plural. But Italian *nozze* and French *noces*, which is also plural, both come from the plural Latin noun *nuptiae*, ‘marriage’—which reminds us that English, too, has a plural word for this: *nuptials*.

1.14 Apothec

In Britain we normally say that we are going to take our doctors’ prescriptions to the chemists. We are also perfectly familiar with the word which most Americans and Canadians would use, pharmacy. Some form of this latter word is also used in most of the languages of southern Europe: *pharmacie* in French, *farmacia* in Spanish and Portuguese, *farmaci* in Albanian, *pharmakeio* in Greek.

The older English word for a chemist was apothecary. Chaucer wrote of his character the Doctor: ‘Ful redy hadde he his apothecaries to send him drogges and his letuaries [medicines]’. There are still people in Britain whose family name is Potticary, derived from the name of this occupation with the first syllable missing.

In mediaeval England, the apothecary was the person who ran the chemist’s establishment, while the shop itself was known as an *apothec*, meaning ‘store house’, but especially one for keeping medicines.

We have since lost this word ourselves, but some form of *apothec* is still the normal term for a chemist’s shop in most of northern Europe. In Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, it’s *apotek*, and in Dutch *apotheek*. Polish has *apteka*, Estonian *apteek*, Finnish has *apteekki* and in Latvian it is *aptieka*.

In fact, in one form or another, *apothec* is an extremely European word. It came into English from Old French *apotheque*, meaning ‘shop’ or ‘magazine’. This had in turn come down from Latin *apotheca*, which had been borrowed into Latin from the Greek word *apothiki*, which is still the Modern Greek word for a ‘warehouse’. The source was the Ancient Greek verb *apo-theto*, where *apo* meant ‘from’ and *theto* meant ‘to put’ or ‘place’—so, ‘to put away, to place in storage’.

But there is another chapter in the story of *apothiki*. Italians use the word *farmacia* for chemist, like other southern European languages, but they do also have a word which descends directly from Greek/Latin *apotheca*. This is *bottega*, ‘shop’, where the first syllable of the original word has been dropped. A similar process has produced the Catalan word for shop, *botiga*. The Spanish form *bodega* refers to a cellar, but particularly a wine cellar; the Danes have borrowed the Spanish word to signify a wine bar. In Portuguese the first syllable still survives: their word *abdega*, ‘wine-shop’, derives from an older Portuguese version *abodega*.

Over the centuries the Italian form *bottega* eventually made its way north into the Provençal language of southern France in the form of *botica*. This then spread up...
into northern France, where it became *boutique* in French. I first heard the word *boutique* when I started learning French at secondary school – we were taught it was the word for ‘shop’. But recently it has become very much an English word: these days we have boutique hotels, boutique rooms, even boutique bars.

We can understand how this development came about if we note that *boutique* first came into English from French in the late 1700s with the meaning of ‘shop’, but that even then it most usually referred to a small shop. In 1950s America, *boutique* then started acquiring the more specialised meaning of an establishment – especially a clothes shop – which was not just small but was also specialised, trend-setting and fashionable. (In Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, there is even a clothes shop which calls itself *Bodega Boutique*). By the 1960s, *boutique* had begun to be used as an adjective referring to the sort of items which are offered for sale in these small, would-be-exclusive businesses – a boutique dress, boutique shoes, a boutique handbag. And since the 1980s it has increasingly been employed to describe small businesses – especially hotels – which provide services for a limited, exclusive, sophisticated clientele.

So there we have it. The Greek word for a warehouse; the Latvian word for a chemist’s store; the Danish word for a wine bar; the Catalan word for a shop; and the English word for something small, exclusive and expensive – they all come from the same Ancient Greek word for a place where you put something away in order to store it. Over the last 2,000 years, this word has travelled all over Europe leaving various versions of itself behind with different meanings in different places.

1.15 Compassion and Sympathy

The Modern Greek word for the number 6 is *exi*. From the point of view of an English speaker, it seems as if there is something missing from the beginning of this word – and in a way, there is. The Ancient Greek form was *hex*, but the *h* (which came from an earlier *s*) has been dropped in the modern language. This earlier *s* is still preserved in the corresponding Latin word for 6, *sex*, as well as in English *six*, German *sechs* and Gaelic *sia*. The pre-Ancient Greek change of *s* to *h* is also reflected in Latin *super* versus Greek *hyper*, ‘over’; and in Latin *sub* versus Greek *hypo*, ‘under’.

The parallel forms *sub* and *hypo* both occur as prefixes in Modern English in words like *subcutaneous* and *hypodermic*. These two words actually have more or less the same meaning: *subcutaneous* comes from Latin *sub* plus *cutis*, ‘skin’, while *hypodermic* is from Ancient Greek *hypo* plus *derma*, ‘skin’, so both versions mean ‘under the skin’. English has frequently borrowed pairs of equivalent words like this from the two classical languages and then assigned them different – sometimes only subtly different – meanings. In Modern English, we have sorted this particular pair out in such a way that *hypodermic* refers mostly to needles, and *subcutaneous* most often to medical conditions and procedures.
Similarly, sympathy and compassion do not mean exactly the same thing in English, but the words have the same origins in terms of classical elements. Sympathy comes from Ancient Greek sympatheia, composed of syn, ‘with’, plus pathos, ‘suffering’; and compassion is from Late Latin compassionem, from com, ‘with’, plus passionem ‘suffering’. So these two words are simply Greek- and Latin-origin versions of the same term which we have given slightly different meanings to.

Another syn- and con- pair is synchronous and contemporary. Ancient Greek chronos and Latin tempus both mean ‘time’. Once again, this pair are by no means totally synonymous in English: contemporary means ‘at the same time’ in the sense of ‘at the same period of history’, while synchronous tends to be used more often to mean ‘at the same (brief) point of time’.

Synthesis and composition also bear the same kind of relationship to each other. The second parts of these two words both carry the same meaning – ‘putting, placing’ – and come from, respectively, Ancient Greek thesis and Latin positio. Both words therefore have the sense of ‘placing together’.

There is yet another English word-pair which is constructed from two sets of parallel elements, hypo-sub and thesis-positio. This is hypothesis and supposition. The basic senses of both terms – ‘under’ plus ‘placing’ – to give us the meaning ‘foundation, basis, basis for an argument’. In Modern English, although the two terms do not denote exactly the same concept, they are clearly linked: a hypothesis really is something which you suppose.

Another Greek–Latin meaning pair is periphery and circumference. Peri and circum are respectively the (unrelated) Greek and Latin words for ‘around’. But the second elements of the two words – from Ancient Greek pherein, ‘to carry, bear’, and Latin ferre, ‘to carry, bear’ – do have the same origin.

This same second element also appears in another Latin–Greek pair, again with unrelated first elements: transfer and metaphor. Latin trans, ‘across, on the farther side of, beyond, over’, plus ferre combine to give us transfer; and Greek meta, also indicating some kind of movement from one place to another, plus phora, ‘carrying’ – derived from pherein, ‘to carry’ – gives us metaphor. Tourists in Greece are often amused by the sight of lorries driving around with the word metaphorés written on the side in large letters. While in English metaphor is a word which is – appropriately enough – only used metaphorically, in Modern Greek it is also used literally to mean ‘transport, haulage’.

**SUPPOSITORY**

One way to say ‘I suppose’ in Modern Greek is hypothéto – except that the h has been lost, so it is actually ypótheto. But if you are trying to speak Greek, be sure to put the stress in the right place: ypótheto means ‘suppository’. The Latin-derived English words suppose and suppository are, of course, also related in the same way.
In English we do not really have a true equivalent of the French expression *bon appétit* to wish people who are about to start a meal a ‘good appetite’. But most other European languages do seem to have some kind of similar formula: German speakers say *Guten Appetit!*, Polish has *Smacznego!* and in Greek the corresponding phrase is *Kali órexi!*

In Greek *kali* means ‘good’. And the Greek term *órexi*, ‘appetite’, will not be totally unknown to English speakers these days because of the much discussed eating disorder, anorexia nervosa. The *an-* prefix in *anorexia* signifies ‘absence of’ (as also in *anaerobic*, ‘without air’). So *anorexia* – also *anorexy* in older English usage – indicates ‘absence of appetite’. A much more recent coinage is *orthorexia* ‘a pathological fixation on eating proper food’, with the *ortho-* part meaning ‘straight, upright, correct, proper’, as in *orthodox, orthography* and so on. And there is another medical term, *polyorexia*, which means ‘having excessive appetite’ – in other words, eating too much.

The English language itself seems to have had a very healthy appetite for borrowing Greek words for undesirable conditions, unfortunate events and other unpleasant phenomena (*phenomenon* is also a Greek word, from the verb *phenein*, ‘to appear’). The name of the eating disorder *bulimia* comes from Ancient Greek *boulímia*, ‘ravenous hunger’, originally composed of *bous*, ‘ox’ and *limós*, ‘hunger’. *Xenophobia* is put together from Greek *xénos*, ‘stranger, foreigner, guest’, followed by *phóbos*, ‘fear’. And *misogyny* consists of the Ancient Greek word for ‘hatred’, *mísos*, also seen in *misanthropy*, and the word for ‘woman’, *gyné*, which also occurs in *gynaecology*.

We would, in fact, have a hard time talking and writing about disasters in English if it were not for the Ancient Greeks. Our Greek-origin vocabulary for various types of crisis is very extensive. The word *crisis* itself has its origins in the Ancient Greek word *krísis*, from the verb *krínein*, ‘to decide’. In Modern Greek, *kríno* means ‘I judge’. So a crisis was originally some kind of decisive turning point.

Much worse than a crisis, of course, is an *apocalypse* – from Ancient Greek *apokálypsis*, where *apo-* meant ‘off, from’ and *kálypsis* meant ‘cover’, so the whole word meant ‘uncovering, disclosure’. The original meaning in English was ‘revelation’; but because of the events described in the Revelation of St John – the destruction of the world after the Second Coming of Christ – it came to signify a disaster resulting in drastic, irreversible and possibly worldwide damage to human societies – some kind of major cataclysm, in other words.

*Cataclysm* is also a Greek-origin word. In Modern Greek the most usual meaning of *katáklysmós* is ‘flood’, which was its earliest meaning in English too, particularly with reference to the biblical flood. But then it acquired the more figurative meaning of a political or social upheaval which sweeps away the established order. The ultimate origin of the word lies in Greek *kata*, ‘down’ and *klýzo*, ‘to clean with water, wash down, wash out’.

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1.16 Apocalypse

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And of course a cataclysm can lead to chaos – which is also a Greek word. Ancient Greek \( \text{kháos} \) meant 'a gulf or chasm of emptiness'. Needless to say, \( \text{chasm} \), too, is a word we borrowed from the Ancient Greeks. And the cha- at the beginning of chaos and chasm comes from the Greek root \( kha- \), ‘gape’. In Modern Greek, \( \text{khásima} \) means ‘yawn’.

Cataclysms, apocalypses and crises can all end in tragedy, a word which comes from the Ancient Greek \( \text{tragodia} \), ‘tragic play, tragic drama’. The second element of the word is from \( \text{ódé} \), ‘ode’. Rather surprisingly, it is thought that the first part probably derives from \( \text{trágos} \), ‘billy-goat’. One possible explanation for this etymology is that a goat was awarded as a prize to the winner of early Athenian tragedy-writing contests.

### CHAOS AND GAS

The Flemish scientist J. B. van Helmont invented the word \( \text{gas} \), which he derived from Ancient Greek \( \text{kháos} \), ‘total emptiness’. To understand how he arrived at this neologism, it helps to know that the \( g \) at the beginning of \( \text{gas} \) in Dutch is pronounced like the \( kh \) at the beginning of Greek \( \text{kháos} \) – that is, rather like the \( ch \) in German Nacht or Scots loch.

1.17 Patron

Many people who have visited Crete as tourists will have walked down the Samariá Gorge, the longest and deepest ravine in Europe. The strenuous but beautiful 10-mile hike, which ends on the shores of the Libyan Sea on the south coast of the island, starts at a height of about 3,500 feet, in the heart of the famous White Mountains of Crete, on the beautiful mountain-ringed Omalós Plateau.

The name of this high plain famously features in one of the best-known of all Greek songs. Sometimes called ‘The Rebel’, it is a traditional song of the Cretans’ resistance in their struggle against the occupying powers of, first, the Venetians and then the Ottoman Turks.

The song, in Cretan Greek, starts: \( \text{Pótes tha kámi ksasteriá?} \) ‘When will there be clear skies?’ It continues with lines which can be translated into English as: ‘When will February come, so I can take my rifle, and my beautiful \( \text{patróna} \), and go up to Omalós?’ As sung by the renowned Cretan musician Nikos Ksylouris, the song became a rallying cry for the resistance movement against the military junta which ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974. The memory of this fascist dictatorship, and the strong desire that nothing of the sort should ever be allowed to happen in Greece again, was one of the reasons why the Greek people were so keen to join the democratic bulwark of the European Union, which they did in 1981.

The Greek word \( \text{patróna} \) which occurs in this revolutionary song is sometimes translated as ‘cartridge belt’ or ‘cartridge case’; but it has been argued that the
original meaning of the word – as borrowed from Venetian – was ‘cartridge pouch’.
One thing that is certain is that, unlikely as this may seem, patróna has the same
origin as the English words patron and pattern – which were originally simply two
different pronunciations and spellings of the same word.

*Patron*, which comes from Latin *patronus*, ‘protector, defender’ – in some cases
via the French word *patron*, ‘chief, boss’ – is ultimately derived from Latin *pater*,
‘father’, in much the same way that *matron* is derived from *mater*, ‘mother’.

The word *patron* has many different meanings in English. It can denote the host
or landlord of an inn or restaurant; and, confusingly, it can also refer to someone
who is a loyal and regular customer of the same restaurant – or even just a one-time
customer. It can also refer to a donor or supporter – as in a ‘patron of the arts’ – and
to the patron saint of a church or nation. And while *patronising* a restaurant is
a good thing for that establishment, *patronising* a person is, these days, mostly a bad
thing – as accusations that someone is being ‘patronising’ reveal.

But what does any of this have to do with Cretan rebels waiting for spring to
come so that they can assemble up on the mountain fastness of the Omalós Plateau?

The answer lies in some of the Modern English meanings of *pattern* which come
from the use of *patron* in the sense of ‘master copy, original version, exemplar,
model to copy from’. (Modern French *patron* can also mean ‘pattern’.)

This sense of being a model, or an object with a particular shape, gave rise in English
to certain usages in which the spelling *patron* continued to be employed. In some of
these, we can see how the Cretan use of the term *patróna* may have arisen. According to
the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English, one of the
meanings of *patron* was ‘a paper container for the charge of a cannon or pistol; a paper
cartridge’. And by the nineteenth century, the word had come to have the possible
military meaning of a wooden or steel ‘box for holding cartridges’ – precisely the sort of
object that Cretan rebels would want to take with them up into the mountains in the
spring.

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**BOULEVARD**

*Bulwark* is a common Germanic word – in Dutch it is *bolwerk*, in Norwegian *bolverk*. It
probably came from the older forms which in Modern English have become *bole*, ‘tree-
trunk’ and *work* – so referring to defences made from tree trunks. The Germanic word was
also borrowed into French, where it appears today as *boulevard* – originally a walkway on
top of the defences around a town.

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**1.18 Liturgy**

If you are on holiday in Greece or Cyprus, you may be unlucky enough to come
across a sign hanging on the door of your hotel lift saying *Ektós liturgías*.
Ektós is not necessarily a totally unfamiliar form to all English speakers since it occurs in a number of technical words, like *ectoparasite*, ‘a parasite – such as a flea living outside its host’; *ectothermic*, referring to animals which obtain their heat from external sources, such as by basking in the sun; and the infamous *ectoplasm*, ‘a supernatural viscous substance exuded by a spiritual medium during a trance’. In Greek, on the other hand, *ektós* is a perfectly normal everyday word which simply means ‘outside, without, except’.

*Liturgia* looks even more familiar. *Liturgy*, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, signifies ‘a form of public worship, especially in the Christian Church; a collection of formularies for the conduct of divine service’. For us, it is a specifically religious word referring to a church service. The term first appeared in English in the sixteenth century as a loan from Greek via French.

But in Modern Greek, *liturgía* is an everyday word referring to any kind of service. As in English, it can refer to a religious service. But it can just as well refer to the functioning, operation, running or working of more or less anything. So this Greek-origin word with a rather specific meaning in English has a much more general meaning in Modern Greek itself. The sad fact is that the sign on the lift saying *Ektós liturgías* just means ‘out of service’ – you are going to have to walk up the stairs.

The same process has happened the other way round. In English, *service* can mean any number of different things. We have the health service, the police service, the probation service, social services and armed services. You can be involved in domestic service, military service or voluntary service. We might eat off and drink from a dinner service and a tea service. Institutions which have borrowed money may have to service a debt. You can perform a service for someone. And engineers service boilers – and even lifts.

But our word *service* has been borrowed into Greek as *sérvis* and, like *liturgy* in English, it has a much more limited range of meanings there. As in English, *sérvis* can be used in connection with having your car or your air-conditioning checked, or informally with reference to service in a restaurant or hotel – some Greek restaurants are *selph-sérvis*. But that’s about it.

A similar example of an everyday Greek word having a more restricted and erudite meaning in English can be seen any day of the week along Greek roads, where, as we have seen, you are bound to come across lorries with the word *metaphorés* written on the side, often as part of the phrase *Metaphorés-Metakomisis*.

A *metaphor* in English is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is transferred to an entity which, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is ‘different from but analogous to’ what it is literally applicable to – as when Shakespeare wrote ‘All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players’; or, more prosaically, when we talk of the ‘mouth’ of a river or the ‘foot’ of a hill.
Metaphor was also first borrowed from Greek into English in the sixteenth century. It comes from Ancient Greek meta, ‘across’, and phora, ‘carrying’. In English we use the word – there is no other way of saying this! – metaphorically, to indicate a transfer of meaning from one entity to another. In Modern Greek it can be used in this way, too. But it is also much more frequently used, entirely literally, to refer to the transfer of anything or anybody from one place to another. Metaphorés-Metakomísis means ‘Transport-Removals’: metaphorá, plural metaphorés, is most often used to mean simply ‘transport, haulage’.

SERVE

The Australian Sam Groth holds the record for the fastest tennis serve of all time, 163 mph. After this masterly feat of athletic prowess, Sam might have been surprised to learn that to serve, ‘to start play by striking the ball into the opposite court’, comes originally from the Latin word servus, ‘slave’.

1.19 Focus

From time to time on our TV screens we are shown events such as royal gala performances, awards ceremonies and film premieres, where cameramen focus their lenses on celebrities as they enter the foyer of the theatre which is hosting the event.

Most of the participants at such events are probably not even slightly interested in the fact that the two words focus and foyer originally derive from the same source. How on earth could it come about that a verb meaning ‘to adjust an optical instrument so as to see a sharply defined image’ and a noun meaning ‘the entrance lobby of a theatre’ come from the same root? The story of the strange journeys these words have taken is a fascinating one, which shows very clearly the extent to which it is natural for languages to change with respect to both their sound systems and word meanings.

In the classical Latin of Ancient Rome, the word focus meant ‘hearth’. There was also an adjective focarium, derived from focus, which meant ‘having to do with a hearth’ as used, for instance, to refer to a kitchen servant – someone whose job it was to work around the fireplace. Over the centuries, as the Vulgar Latin that was spoken in northern France gradually morphed into mediaeval Old French, through natural processes of sound change focarium became foier, which came to be used as a noun referring specifically to a domestic hearth.

In the fullness of time, this French word foier (later spelt foyer) acquired the meaning of ‘a cosy, friendly place’. It eventually began to be used in the context of theatres to refer to what is known in English as the ‘green room’, signifying the cosy, friendly place where performers wait in a theatre before going on stage. The meaning of ‘a cosy,
welcoming lobby of a theatre’ developed later; and it was not until the nineteenth century that the word finally made its way into English. The Oxford English Dictionary gives 1859 for the earliest usage of foyer in this sense, and even then it was printed in italics, indicating that it was still considered to be a word of foreign origin. Foyer rapidly made its way into many other languages as well, sometimes with respelling: Swedish foajé, Croatian foaje, Estonian fuajee, Romanian foaier, Turkish fuaye.

So that was one – very long – route which the Latin word focus took on its journey towards becoming a part of English vocabulary. But it also took another, much more straightforward route. Starting in the 1600s, scholars who knew Latin introduced the word focus directly into their English writings, without any mediation from French, so that focus arrived in English much earlier than foyer. For a brief period when focus was first used in English, it meant ‘hearth’ as in the original Latin, though it could also refer to a source of heat. But almost from the very beginning, it also tended to be employed figuratively.

Focus was first used in its modern scientific sense of ‘point of convergence’ by Johannes Kepler, the German mathematician and astronomer, in his work on optics in the early 1600s. Kepler wrote in Latin, not English, and would have spoken about the topic in German, so the first known usages in English of the word focus in the optical sense come later, from the 1650s and 1660s. Its first metaphorical usages, such as focus of attention, date from the 1700s.

Kepler probably chose the Latin word focus because he was likening a point of optical convergence, where light rays meet, to a source from which light rays emanate, such as a hearth with a fire burning in it. In Modern French, foyer can still mean both ‘hearth, lobby, fireplace’ and ‘focus’. And even today, English-speaking people can be heard to remark that their fireplace, or their wood-burning stove, is the focus of their living room.

1.20 Remain or Stay?

On flights coming into London, airline passengers often hear messages from the cabin crew along the lines of ‘we are about to commence our descent into Heathrow Airport’. Anybody who knows anything about English will recognise that this is not anything any native English speaker would normally say in the course of their everyday lives. Very few of us, on spotting the Channel coast coming up out of the plane window, would turn to our partner and say: ‘Look dear, I think we must be about to commence our descent’.

Commence is not a word that English speakers use on a day-to-day basis. At the beginning of a dinner party, it is not usual for the host(ess) to say, to the assembled company: ‘Please commence’. Teachers do not tell pupils about to take an exam that ‘you may now commence’. Football fans do not ask ‘what time does the match commence tomorrow?’
Commence is a word which people who make public announcements use only because they have been told to do so by their bosses, because the bosses think it sounds more impressive. This is the same phenomenon as railway passengers being told to alight from the train rather than get off: railway chiefs seem to think it is more important for their announcements to sound impressive than to be understood. And it is the same phenomenon we find in notices reading ‘No alcoholic beverages to be consumed on these premises’.

A large proportion of would-be-‘impressive’ English words come from French. Alight is not one of those – it is Old English in origin. But commence is from French, and so are descent, consume and beverage.

The Oxford English Dictionary tells us that the word commence is ‘precisely equivalent to the native begin’, and that begin is ‘preferred in ordinary use; commence has more formal associations with law and procedure, combat, divine service, and ceremonial’. A plane coming into land has nothing to do with combat, divine service or ceremonial, but for reasons best known to themselves, many airlines prefer to use artificially ceremonial language for such routine events: they may also have mislaid your baggage rather than lost your suitcase.

This point about natural, informal words versus artificially formal vocabulary can be raised in connection with the 2016 EU referendum. The choice we were given on the ballot paper was between leave and remain.

Leave is an ancient Germanic word which has been part of English ever since it was a language. The Old English form læfan was related to Old Frisian leva, Old Saxon levian and Old High German leiben. The word was brought across the North Sea to this island by our Anglo-Saxon linguistic ancestors during the period AD 350–550 and has always been a natural part of our speech.

This is not true of remain. This word was not used in English until the fifteenth century, having originally been found only in the Norman French of our post-1066 overlords. It is still relatively formal in tone, and is not much used in daily conversation. We don’t command the dog to ‘Remain!’ – dogs are instructed to ‘Stay!’ We do not normally ask ‘How long are you remaining in Marbella?’ It is not usual to say ‘Just remain there while I get it for you’. Remain is a member of the commence–consume–beverage set of formal words which are generally absent from normal, everyday conversation.

Is it totally impossible that the result of the EU referendum could have been different if the ballot paper had asked us, not if we wanted to remain in the EU, but if we wanted to stay? After all, the wording for the 1975 referendum was: ‘Do you think that the United Kingdom should stay in the European Community (the Common Market)?’ The result back then was a 67 per cent ‘yes’ vote.

It would be interesting to know who decided to use remain rather than stay this time round.