English I

Being a history of English spelling.

**From the Celts to Old English.**

Tutor: There’s a reason for everything.

*Student: I suppose so.*

There’s always a reason.

*Well…*

We don’t always know it, of course.

*No, we don’t.*

But there always is one.

*You’re probably right.*

There’s even a reason for spelling!

*Spelling?*

Yes. Even spelling.

*Is there?*

Yes.

*And what is it?*

It’s called etymology.

*What?*

Etymology.

*Pardon?*

Etymology. That’s what we’re talking about.

*And what is etymology?*

The history of words.

*The history of words?*

How words come to be the way they are.

*The history of words?*

Yes.

*Right.*

Etymology.

*You say etymology is the history of words.*

Because it is.

*In that case, I’ve got a question for you.*

Oh, dear!

*What is the etymology of ‘etymology’ ?*

Hey! That’s a really good question!

*I know a lot of words end in –ology.*

Well, yes.

*Like technology.*

Yes. Or Biology.

*It’s a very common ending, isn’t it?*

-ology? Yes. Very common.

*Lots of words end in -ology.*

Yes. Ecology, geology, climatology, criminology. Lots of them.

*So, what does it mean?*

What?

*-ology.*

It comes from a Greek word.

*Right*.

The word ‘logos’.

*Logos?*

Yes.

*Which means?*

Reason, or perhaps understanding.

*Is that where the word ‘logic’ comes from?*

Exactly. Using reason.

*OK. So –ology means understanding.*

Yes.

*So technology means understanding technical stuff?*

And biology means understanding living things.

*OK. But what about the other bit?*

The other bit?

*Yes. The other bit of the word.*

Etymology?

*Yes. That one.*

Greek again.

*Right.*

It comes from ‘etymon’.

*And what does that mean?*

The origins of words.

*Where words come from?*

Yes.

*So etymology means ‘understanding where words come from’?*

That’s right. Understanding the history of words.

*Where words come from.*

Yes.

*A lot of our words come from Greek, do they?*

Some do. Usually technical words.

*Like?*

Well, photography does, and automatic. Lexicon.

*Lexicon? What does that mean?*

Like a dictionary.

*OK.*

Technical words.

*Right. Where else?*

Pardon?

*Where else do our words come from?*

Oh. Everywhere, really. Latin, Old English, Old Norse, French.

*Oh.*

All over the place, really.

*Why?*

Why? How do you mean “why”?

*How did they get here?*

Oh. Well, people kept on invading!

*Oh.*

England was invaded by many different people.

*I suppose so.*

The Romans.

*The Anglo-Saxons.*

Yes. And the Vikings.

*The Normans.*

All these people invaded.

*All speaking different languages, I suppose.*

Yes.

*The Romans spoke Latin.*

Right.

*The Anglo-Saxons spoke Anglo-Saxon.*

They did.

*The Vikings spoke Norse.*

Well, Old Norse.

*And the Normans spoke French.*

Exactly.

*The Anglo-Saxons spoke Anglo-Saxon.*

Yes. They did.

*Which was Old English, wasn’t it?*

Pretty much.

*OK.*

The Vikings spoke Norse.

*That’s right.*

Old Norse, anyway.

*And the Normans spoke French.*

Yes. So English has many roots.

*It’s a real mix.*

It’s a wonderful mix.

*Where do most of our words come from?*

Old English, probably.

*Old English?*

Or Latin.

*Latin?*

Sort of.

*Sort of?*

Well, some came straight from Latin.

*When the Romans invaded?*

Yes.

*Or?*

Sometimes Latin got here via French.

*When the Normans invaded?*

In 1066.

*1066?*

That’s when the Normans invaded.

*Oh.*

William the Conqueror landed in 1066.

*Speaking French?*

That’s what the Normans spoke.

*Right.*

And a lot of French words come from Latin.

*Do they?*

Loads of them.

*So some of our Latin words come from French?*

Probably most of them.

*English is a real mix.*

Well, it is.

*Different people invading Britain.*

Yes.

*Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, Normans.*

All speaking different languages.

*Latin.*

Anglo-Saxon.

*Old Norse.*

French.

*All sorts.*

Yes.

*Who was here to begin with?*

Pardon?

*Who was here to begin with?*

Before the Romans invaded?

*Yes.*

The Celts

*The Celts?*

Yes.

*How long ago?*

Oh, around 2,000 years ago.

*Way back.*

Yes. Way back.

*Who were they?*

Dark haired people.

*Oh.*

Short, stocky people.

*But they didn’t speak English?*

No.

*What did they speak?*

They spoke Celtic languages.

*Like?*

Like Welsh, or Gaelic.

*Welsh or Gaelic?*

Some people still do.

*Really?*

Yes, in Wales and Scotland.

*Oh.*

Parts of Ireland, too.

*What happened to the Celts?*

They were driven away.

*By the Romans?*

Yes.

*Where did they go?*

Places like Wales, Cornwall, Ireland, or Scotland.

*Not all of them, surely?*

No. Lots of them stayed

*Even after the Romans had invaded?*

Yes. They lived alongside the Romans.

*Do we speak much of their language now?*

Almost none. In England, anyway.

*How much do we speak?*

Only a few place names, really.

*Like?*

Well, the word Thames is Celtic.

*Oh.*

And Avon.

*Avon?*

Means ‘river’.

*Oh.*

Still does, in Welsh.

*And what about the Romans?*

Latin.

*Pardon?*

The Romans spoke Latin.

*Do we use much Latin now?*

Loads.

*Like what?*

Well, the word invade is from Latin.

*And?*

So is study. And vision. Calculate. Event. Loads of words.

*And?*

Part and particular come from Latin.

*There must be more than that!*

O.K. Possible and probable.

*Are they Latin words?*

Possibilis and probabilis in Latin.

*Right.*

There are lots more…

*Like?*

I don’t know; dentist, gentle, people, nerve, sign, face, germ, science…

*Science comes from Latin?*

Oh yes.

*Really?*

Science comes from ‘*scio’.*

*Scio?*

Scio is Latin for “to know”.

*How long ago was all this?*

All what?

*When the Romans were here.*

They left about 1,500 years ago.

*OK.*

But then the Angles and the Saxons invaded.

*Where did they come from?*

They came from what we call Germany now.

*And they spoke Anglo-Saxon?*

Yes. They spoke Anglo-Saxon.

*Which was really Old English?*

Yes. Kind of. The beginning of English, anyway.

*And they settled here?*

The Anglo-Saxons?

*Yes.*

Yes. They settled here.

*Speaking Old English?*

Yes.

*I’ve heard of King Alfred.*

Oh?

*He was king around that time.*

He was.

*He was known as Alfred the Great.*

That’s right.

*Was Alfred the Great an Anglo-Saxon?*

Yes. He was.

*How long ago did he live?*

Just over 1,000 years ago.

*500 years after the Romans left.*

Yes.

*And he spoke Old English?*

Yes. He did.

*He was king when the Vikings came.*

Yes. He was.

*And everyone spoke Old English?*

Yes, pretty much.

*Mmmm…*

It was very different to the English we speak now.

*Really?*

Very different.

*So we don’t speak Old English today?*

No, not really.

*Oh.*

But we still use a lot of Old English words.

*Oh.*

Lots of Anglo-Saxon words have survived.

*Words like?*

Well, like man, wife, love, eat, house, right, left, night, go, food.

*OK.*

And lots of the small words like of, to, but, and, in, on.

*Lots of very common words, in fact.*

Some of our most robust words are Old English.

*Robust words?*

Yes.

*How do you mean “robust”?*

Well, you know, strong.

*Strong?*

Well, sturdy.

*What do you mean?*

Everyday words.

*Everyday words?*

Yes.

*Mmmm…*

Nice, ordinary words.

*How do you mean “nice, ordinary words”?*

You know. Plain words.

*You mean nothing fancy.*

Right. Good words.

*Simple words?*

That’s it! Exactly!

*Simple words?*

Yes. Simple words that everyone likes.

*Like?*

Well, ‘eat’ instead of ‘consume’.

*Mmmm…*

‘Buy’ rather than ‘purchase’.

*OK.*

‘Use’ instead of ‘utilise’.

*I see what you mean.*

What we might call “plain English”.

*Simple words.*

But with more meaning, somehow.

*Plain words.*

Straightforward words.

*Simple words.*

*Yes.*

*Nice words.*

I think so.

*Nice and old.*

Yes.

*Nice and plain and Anglo-Saxon !*

Yes!