

Examples are *zinc* and *noodle* (German), *trousers* and *whisk[e]y* (Irish and Scottish Gaelic), *jackal* and *yogurt* (Turkish), *tea* and *typhoon* (Chinese), *bungalow* and *jungle* (Hindi), and *moose* and *tomahawk* (American Indian languages). As is evident from this list, English was collecting words from every part of the world, developing a truly international character in its vocabulary.

Interestingly, some Latin and French words borrowed in the Early Modern English period had previously been borrowed during the Middle English period and were already in the lexicon in a different form. This resulted in *doublets* (two words from the same source that enter a language from different routes). Some examples follow.

DOUBLETS IN MODERN ENGLISH

Middle English	Early Modern English	Middle English	Early Modern English
armor	armature	chamber	camera
choir	chorus	frail	fragile
gender	genus	jealous	zealous
prove	probe	strait	strict
strange	extraneous	treasure	thesaurus

With the Old English words as a base and with new loanwords entering the language, English found itself with a huge number of synonyms, as we have seen. Many of these disappeared from use, but a large number survived. A language does not usually retain exact synonyms; they will differ in some way. Geoffrey Hughes shows that this difference has to do with their register. He suggests that the English lexicon developed a three-register structure reflecting the historical origins of the words.⁹ Old English words have what might be called a general or popular feeling, the French loanwords have a more formal tone, whereas the Latin loanwords feel right in intellectual and technical contexts. Figure 7 illustrates this relationship between historical origin and register, using three “triplets” of words.

Hughes suggests that virtually any word field reflects this three-register structure, and it is not difficult to find examples covering a range of concepts, as seen in Table 7.

A range of synonyms like this gives English an amazing ability to express nuanced ideas. We can also see again that the willingness of English to keep near-synonyms is another important reason for its distinctively large and varied vocabulary.