

# WHY DO WE SPEAK ENGLISH?

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If you travel some distance from where you live, you'll notice that people don't speak in the same way as you and your friends do. You'll hear different sounds – what we call differences of accent. And you'll also hear different words and ways of making sentences – what we call differences of dialect.

Accents and dialects show where you come from. People say such things as 'He sounds Welsh,' or 'She sounds as if she comes from London.' People from other countries have accents and dialects too. You can tell that someone is from America or Australia by the way they speak.

Accents and dialects change when people move from one place to another. They leave behind the way they used to speak, and start speaking in a new way. This is what happened thousands of years ago, as people began to explore our planet. When they settled in a new place, they would gradually develop new ways of speaking, and over a long period of time their speech would sound so different that if they went back to

where they came from, they wouldn't be understood there any more. When that happens, we say that they had begun to speak a different language.

About three thousand years ago, groups of people who lived in southern and eastern Europe began to move into the northern regions that today we call Germany, Holland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. They are known as the Germanic peoples, and the dialects and languages they spoke are all called Germanic too.

A monk called Bede wrote a book telling us how groups of Germanic people arrived in Britain in the fifth century from different parts of northern Europe. He says some of them were called Angles, some were called Saxons and some were called Jutes. They settled in different parts of Britain. And it didn't take long before they developed new ways of speaking.

After a while, people began to give these new settlers a name. They called them Anglo-Saxons – in other words, the 'English' Saxons, not the other Saxons who still lived in mainland Europe. They called this country 'English land', and eventually this became the name we now know, England. And the language spoken by these new Saxons, they called 'English'.

If you look at the English that the Anglo-Saxons spoke, you'll find it's very different from what we use today. There have been so many changes that it's almost like a foreign language. We call it Old English.

If you travelled back in time a thousand years, you'd have some difficulty understanding what the Anglo-Saxons were saying. But

you'd recognise quite a few words that are still used in Modern English, such as *house*, *bed*, *child* and *friend*. And if you said to an Anglo-Saxon warrior, 'I live in that street,' he'd know what you were talking about, for all the words in that sentence have been in English for over a thousand years.

