



## Middle English

Eventually Anglo Norman declined and a new form, Middle English, evolved. But French remained the language of court and learning. As a result many Anglo-Saxon words remained in use but lost their social status.



## Pronunciation

French influence on English words can also be seen in pronunciation. One example is the diphthong (long 'o' sound) *boy*, for example. Or the 'th' sound in *thin/shin*.

French words in English generally retain their original pronunciation: *ballet*, for example, has a silent 't' rather than a sounded one as in Spanish. Some common nouns have been completely anglicised e.g. the hard 's' in *Paris*.

## Social Status

Fowler, in his [Modern English Usage](#) (1926) talks about the 'vulgarity' of the excessive use of French words and phrases - an attitude summed up in the old joke: *Pretentious? Moi?*

Sometimes a French word will sound misleadingly *chic* in English. *Bistro* for example, has romantic French associations but the Russian origin is "bystro" meaning "fast". Therefore, your nearest "bistro" is more likely to serve burgers and fries under bright lights than the *menu du jour* by candlelight.

## Quick Check

1. What percentage of English words originate from French?
2. How many French words does the average person know?

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## French Words in Modern English

There are 1,700 cognates (words identical in the French & English) [here](#). Many have equivalents in English (au contraire/on the contrary, for example) but some capture a precise meaning not available in English. Here is a short selection:

<b>à la carte</b>	<b>To choose individual items of menu rather than a fixed price meal.</b>
<b>Aperitif</b>	<b>An alcoholic drink before a meal</b>
<b>à la mode</b>	<b>In the modern style</b>
<b>Adieu</b>	<b>A final farewell</b>
<b>Adroit</b>	<b>Skillful, clever</b>
<b>Gauche</b>	<b>Clumsy, inexperienced.</b>
<b>Genre</b>	<b>Type or class of film, book etc.</b>
<b>Art déco</b>	<b>Design style popular in 1930s e.g. Tiffany lamp, Paris Metro signs etc.</b>
<b>Cordon bleu</b>	<b>Masterchef/high quality food</b>
<b>Déjà vu</b>	<b>Feeling that you have seen seen/experienced something before</b>
<b>Fiancé, fiancée</b>	<b>Engaged to be married</b>

### Quick Check

- Which one of these vocabulary groups does not contain a lot of French words?
  - diplomacy
  - technology
  - food/catering
  - dance
- What is the anglo-saxon alternative word to *bouef*?
- What do call high-quality cooking?
- What is the French word for a drink before a meal?
- Write three more words or phrases you might find in a restaurant.
- Another word for fashionable?
- A type or category of book/film etc?
- Write five sentences using English/French cognates.

**Practise using common French/English cognates in [this crossword](#).**