

2.4.1 The three layers*

By far the most important non-native items in English are those from French and the classical languages, Latin and Greek. Together they give us three historical layers: an Anglo-Saxon, a French and a classical one, each with its own characteristics. **French loans** have made their way into the language since the Norman Conquest of England in 1066; and although they were originally part of the class dialect of the new rulers, they have in the meantime, lost their connotations of prestige, social superiority or courtliness and have become part of the central core of English lexis. French-derived words are prominent for instance in the fields of art and architecture, fashion, religion, hunting, war and politics, but they are especially prominent in food and cooking.

How can the different strata be distinguished and characterized? English often uses Anglo-Saxon words for raw materials and basic processes while words for finished products and more complicated processes come from the French. A classic example of this, mentioned by Sir Walter Scott in the first chapter of his novel *Ivanhoe*, are the Anglo-Saxon animal terms *pig/sow*, *cow* and *calf* as opposed to their meat, *pork*, *beef* and *veal*. While *cook* is Anglo-Saxon, *boil*, *broil*, *fry*, *grill* and *roast* are French, as is *chef*. There is a similar division, this time between the names for the raw materials and the tradesmen, in Anglo-Saxon *beard*, *hair*, *cloth*, *meat*, *stone* and *wood* as opposed to *barber*, *tailor*, *butcher*, *mason* and *carpenter*.

While French contributed a great many terms from the realms of power and the higher arts of living and working, **classical loans** have provided English as well as most other (European) languages with countless technical terms in all branches of human knowledge, a need that was strongly felt by English humanists of the sixteenth century, who wanted English to become a medium capable of expressing the most refined thoughts, on a par with Latin and Greek (see also 6.6.2). *Lexis*, *lexeme*, *lexical*, *lexicographer*, *diction(ary)* and *vocabulary* are all derived from Latin and Greek elements, while only the rarer items *word book* and *word stock* are Germanic in origin.

- * 1. ANGLO-SAXON, OR GERMANIC, LAYER → NATIVE WORDS
 2. FRENCH, OR NORMAN, LAYER } NON-NATIVE
 3. CLASSICAL, I.E. LATIN AND GREEK, LAYER } WORDS

SOURCE: GRAMLEY STEPHAN AND KURT-MICHAEL PATEOLD, 2001:
 "A SURVEY OF MODERN ENGLISH". LONDON AND NEW-YORK:
 ROUTLEDGE, p.28.