



A Study on the History of English Language

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Abstract: The purpose of English in this fast pacing world is informative, expressive as well as directive. English being a global language keeps us refurbished and upgraded about the development and progress spreading throughout the world in myriad spheres of life. Education, Technology, Trade, commerce all greatly depend on the use of English Language. In almost every walk of life, coherence and triumph largely rely upon moderate knowledge of English. The contemporary English language bespeaks many centuries of evolution. Modern English is absolutely different from the Old English. The socio-political phenomenon that led to the course of English history, deeply affected the English people, which in turn had a perceptible repercussion on their language. The Roman Christianization of Britain in 597AD escorted England into close proximity with Latin civilization and made noteworthy incorporations to English vocabulary. The Scandinavian conquest gave rise to an amalgamation of the two cultures and their languages. The Norman invasion made English mainly the language of the lower classes while the aristocrats and those related with them used French in almost all spheres of life. At large during the renaissance period, English established itself as the language of the literary world used by the great writers, educationalists and scientists. In the hands of these intellectuals, English greatly changed in structure as well as lexicon and it emerged into a new version of language. The rise of the Internet, mobile phones and social media have led to a huge increase in the usage of English language. Hence it actually becomes imperative to understand the real intent and physiognomy of English language.

Keywords: English, language, history, countries.

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Man since its inception has been claimed as the most effective 'tool using creature'. Language is also just one of the most important developed grand and daunting tool, in the hands of man which has eventually given shape to the present age. Language, is an assembled set of sounds, which deliver a meaning from the mind of the speaker to the mind of the listener, and thus serve to connect one man with another man. It is the most splendid and rewarding tour de force, in man's endeavor to the present ensuing system of culture and religion, education and ethnicity and above all the unprecedented growth in technology which has connected the whole world at a click. Thus, we see that language is a great boon to human beings which helps in communication, encoding and decoding of thoughts, words and phrases.

Encoding and decoding of messages start right from birth. The spark of discernment kindles even an infant. An infant communicates through his cries and as he grows up, he catches the language spoken around him. The language of his surrounding becomes his mother tongue which he is able to encode or decode without any difficulty. He is fluent in infinite number of sentences in the native language without even consciously learning the various grammatical structure and meaning. He masters this language without much effort. Learning and achieving the same linguistic competence in second language is equally challenging as we do not get the same natural environment that we get for the first language. We could attain this kind of proficiency only if we attain proficiency in four language skills and move ahead with a mindset that the world could yet be interpreted in a rather different way as well that we could just think of.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To study the importance of English language.

To study the history of English language.

III. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This is a qualitative study based upon secondary sources taken from different websites, books, national and international journal, and articles

Importance of English Language



Among the different languages spoken all over the world, English truly deserves to be given the status of World Language. According to 2019 edition of Ethnologue published by SIL International, English ranks third with 369.7 million native speakers, while it ranks first with 898.4 million second language speakers. By choice or by compulsion, English has penetrated into many parts of the world. If we sift the annals of history, we come to know that initially this global language was imposed by the colonizers. Most of the countries shared the destiny of being under British rule and since then English has been taught and made the medium of instruction and communication in schools and colleges and most important, it was and still continues to be used as the language of administration. Gauging the acceptance and popularity of the language, most of the countries have crossed the Rubicon and adopted this legacy left behind by the colonial masters.

Many writers across the world agree that English is the “queen of languages”. Shri C. Rajgopalachari once wrote “English language is the greatest gift of Goddess Saraswati to India”. Reacting to the row across India over English being a foreign and hegemonic language, Rajagopalachari acknowledged that since the Goddess Saraswati had given birth to all the languages of humankind, we should consider English just a language of foreign descent. Mahatma Gandhi said, “English is the language of International commerce; it is the language of diplomacy and it contains many rich literary treasure, it gives an introduction to western thoughts and cultures.”

The United Nations Organization (UNO) has given English the status of an official language. It is not just one of the most widely spoken languages, but the use of this language has made the social and economic exchange between people of different communities and cultures practically possible.

English is a major international language. It is a 'global language', the lingua franca of the contemporary world and presently this language is adopted as the second language around the world. Besides being an international language, it is extensively acknowledged worldwide as a 'language of opportunities', not out of any encumbrance but with an insight that it assures great recompenses. In India, English occupies the position of an associate official language. It is frequently used for inter-state and intra-state communication, owing to the great ethnic and linguistic diversity. Thus, English is indeed pre-requisitely a 'link language'. It is world's most important language having communicative and educative values. It is used for communication, trade, technology, science, etc. It has been taught in our schools and colleges for many decades and is used as a medium of education. It gained further momentum, with the dawn of internet. The social network resonance demonstrated through various web-based requisitions, affirms the potency of English as a global language. English is one of the major requisites for nearly all ultramarine educational schemes. Individuals with better English expertise are preferred for overseas educational fellowships and scholarships.

Thus, if it were not for English, we would not have seen India heading large corporate or occupying key positions in organizations across the globe. It thus, becomes clear that English by now has become the most significant language in India and all over the world, having scientific and technological value.

IV. HISTORY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Introduction

English since times immemorial has been soaking up words from a variety of sources. The present English that we have has been derived from the phonology and morphology of the languages spoken worldwide. French, the language of diplomacy and negotiation in Europe for decades, Latin the language of the priests and Greek the language of wisdom, science and philosophy, enriched the dictionary of English mainly the words related to the field of education. Other European languages added cultural specific words. The American and Indian languages, Australian Aborigine languages, and the languages of Africa and India added many hundreds of words, especially those related to the innumerable species of plants and animals of the world. On top of all this, there is the steady creation of new words and new uses for old words by the many subcultures of the English speaking world.

For having an in-depth knowledge of the present form of English, we need to first travel across time and space to know about the history of when, where and how did this billion-tongued modern English find its voice and forge its way to become a spectacular success. Moreover, for a plausible cognizance of present-day English and for an enlightened approach towards questions influencing the language today, is finding out the trail which it had pursued in becoming what it is. The saga of any language is closely hooked up with the history of the people who speaks it.

As Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable in his book, *A history of the English language* says, “The diversity of cultures that find expression in it is a reminder that the history of English is a story of cultures in contact during the past 1,500 years. It understates matters to say that political, economic, and social forces influence a language. These forces shape the language in every aspect, most obviously in the number and spread of its speakers, and in what is



called “the sociology of language,” but also in the meanings of words, in the accents of the spoken language, and even in the structures of the grammar.”

The English that we know today has developed over hundreds and hundreds of years. This language is a potpourri of different languages. England went through many social and political events that had in the course of English history profoundly affected the English people in their national life which had a recognizable effect on their language.

Saga of English language Evolution

The present-day English language has an unappealing throwback to the invasions and atrocities done with the indigenous people of Britain since 55BC known as Britons. The underpinning of English was actually put by Roman invasions in Britain in 55BC. These Romans brought along with them the Latin language. For the first time the Britons came in contact with this language. This language was the language of the elites, the Britons considered this language as the language of pride and privilege. Just like the colonials encouraged Indians especially at an elite level to start engaging with the English experience and start behaving in western ways, the Romans did the same with the Britons, who were taking the Latin language as the language of the intellectuals.

Though, now this language has virtually become dead, yet the Romans left a light touch on the indigenous Britons. The influence of the language is far reaching. There are lots of words in English with Latin roots. But now Latin could be found only on pages of great writers and scientists like Issac Newton wrote his 'Principia Mathematica' in Latin. Many words in English have Latin derivatives. Words like atrocity, aplomb, futile, human, factory, library, science, military etc. are Latin lexicons. Research says that 29% of English language is influenced by the Latin language.

The Romans left the province in 410 AD and next came the Germanic Tribes from what we know today as Denmark and Northern Germany, comprising of three major groups, Jutes, Angles and the Saxons. Among the three tribes Jutes being less in population did not leave much influence. But Angles and Saxons being the major chunk of the population gave the land its name Angle-Land which later became England. These people lived with the Britons for about 600 years. The language that these people brought with them merged with the Latin language left by the Romans and effectuated the language known as Anglo Saxon language or the Old English language or 'Englisc' which later became 'English'. This period was popularly called the Anglo-Saxon period or the Old English period. Research shows that 26% of modern English is taken from Germanic English. Old English words changed, altered and modified. Old English words had massive change or sound shift in pronunciation and form. The English language uses the Latin alphabet of 26 consonants and vowels. Old English words changed, altered and modified. For example;

- Father- faeder
- modor -mother
- brothor- brother
- neah- near
- that - thaet
- nu - now
- oft - often
- rice - powerful
- sarig - sad, sorrowful
- ariht - right
- beorht - brigh
- dyre - dear, lovely
- eald - old
- til - good
- wlanc – proud
- sellan - to sell
- swincan - to struggle
- willan - to want
- witan - to know
- writan - to write

The most famous literary canon of Old English period is Beowoulf, an epic poem written by anonymous writer. Though the poetry has be translated into modern English by scholars yet it is almost incomprehensible in its original version. This period was popularly called the Anglo-Saxon period or the Old English period.



Next, in the 6th century St. Augustine reached Britain, which marked an extensive adoption of Latin element once again into the existing language. He brought many religious books written in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. We can see that Latin came to England for the second time. This was the reason that a large part of the lexicon of Latin entered English. Two new languages Greek and Hebrew came and research shows that Greek has 6% influence on English language, though Hebrew has very less influence. Many words like geography, android, democracy, economy, climate etc. are derived from German.

Then came the most lethal and savage group of the Vikings in the 8th century from Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden and Denmark. They stayed till the 11th century. They had also brought with them the Germanic language like the old English, middle English, old Norse, and Dutch. The language they spoke was similar to the West Germanic language but with dissimilar dialect. Their contact with the language articulated here created a new Germanic language. So the Germanic language also came twice which naturally led a big impact of 26% on English language.

Then in 1066 AD William the Conqueror, the Duke of Normandy defeated the Vikings and became the ruler of England. This Norman invasion brought French and Latin. French came in England for the first time. This language became the language of the Royal Court, and the ruling and elite classes. The French people being very fond of eatables, added many words related to food products like beef, pork, juice, fruit and other words like people, person, place, real, stay, table, etc. Now Latin also had an indubitable influence on French language. As a matter of fact many Latin words have been adopted in French language which in the long run entered the English vocabulary. So, in effect many words which were initially Latin got merged with French like continue, journey, justice, people etc. and became part of English lexicon. However, this age saw the English language being curbed by the influence of Latin and French. This induced a type of linguistic diversification of the masses, where the lower classes spoke English and the upper classes spoke French. Thus the Norman Conquest made English for two centuries primarily the language of the lower classes while the nobles, leaders and elite society used French.

Nevertheless this demeaning life of English ended when the Normans lost the English provinces in the 14th century. English once again found its way back to supremacy as the language of all strata of the population. This was an age of transition that witnessed many social, political and religious challenges which led to a new version of the language, known as Middle English. The greatest achievement of this period was the emergence of the Standard English language which saw a surge in both form and vocabulary from what it had been in 1066. French and Latin had a waning influence on the language of the day. This age was the first significant literary age heralding a new era of learning with the most famous metropolitan writers like Geoffrey Chaucer, the father of English Literature and John Gower. Though even today, it is very difficult for native English speakers to understand Chaucerian works. Many words like although, towards, echo, poor sentence, etc. were added to the English vocabulary.

Finally, yet most importantly came the modern age which can be categorised as the early modern period and the later modern period in which we are living now. The early modern period or the renaissance period, introduced many Greek and Latin based words in English language. The most famous writer of this age was William Shakespeare who could be called a wordsmith as he concocted many new words and phrases to English language. William Shakespeare alone made up an estimated 1,750 words and idioms, many of which are household phrases today. It was during this period when maritime tourisms were very rampant. Through sea routes people started moving from one country to another bringing along with them new culture and language specially from Spain, Portuguese and America. Most common being 'tobacco' and 'potato', which these people had never even heard of. The most remarkable change related to language happened was the 'great vowel shift' which made a distinct change in pronunciation wherein the vowels started being pronounced shorter and shorter. This has indeed influenced effectively all dialects of English today.

The invention of the mechanical printing press ushered an unprecedented leap forward in standardization of English language as this brought about a stability in the spelling and grammar. Books became cheaper and easily accessible for people to read. The first English dictionary 'Table Alphabeticall', was published in 1604. Now coming to the late modern period when the major evolution in the language was brought firstly by the Industrial revolution, secondly by the expansion of British colonialism and eventually the development of science and technology. From 1600 onwards, the British started its colonization process. It colonized the American, Indian and African(slave trade) countries resulting in a distinct varieties of English, Australian English, New Zealand English, Canadian English, South African English, Indian English and Caribbean English. However, the modern age has been greatly influenced with the American English as America being the biggest hub of music, cinema, trade, technology and internet.

V. CONCLUSION

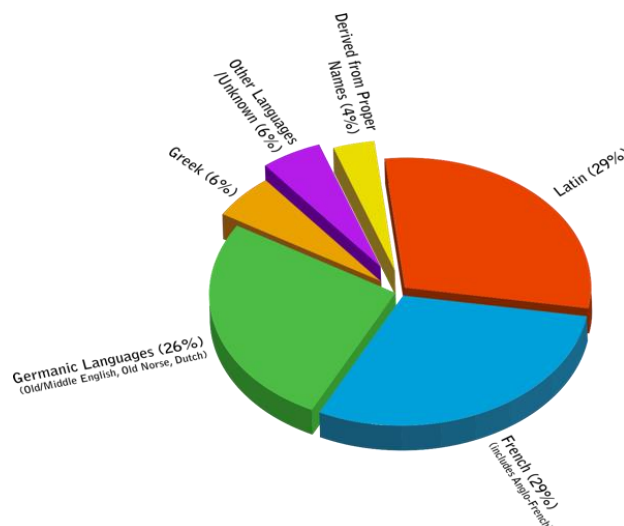
To sum up, undoubtedly, English is the most widespread language in the world, with significant number of speakers in almost all the countries. In this scenario a downright understanding of the essence of English becomes unambiguously



essential. The widespread growing consciousness of the importance of English acts as one of the motivational factors behind this diachronic study of English Language, from Old English to Middle English and now to Modern English. This diachronic study of the language has revealed that real reason for the spread of English are political, cultural and economic rather than linguistic. The history appositely proclaims the centripetal nature of the language before the modern age or to be more specific up to the seventeenth century. It is a rich language with exceptionally high number of words borrowed from other languages crossing borders, battles and conquests.

The lexicon of English language is a blend of Germanic (Old English and Scandinavian), Greek, Latin and French where major chunk is from Latin, Germanic, Greek, and French with few words from other languages owing to its very receptive nature. The English language is considered to be the world language of today. It has an extensive amount of words not found in other languages & its rich vocabulary may sufficiently accommodate all the situations of a social and technical nature.

“A sample of other adaptations are: Spanish-cigar, mosquito, tornado, tomato (tomate) and potato (patata). Hebrew-amen, manna, messiah, rabbi and jubilee. Norwegian-ski. Finnish- sauna. Russian-mammoth and vodka. Czech-robot. Hungarian-paprika. Portuguese-marmalade, flamingo and molasses. Turkish-turban, coffee and caviar. Hindi-sahib, maharajah, jungle, cheetah, karma, mantra and dhoti. Persian-divan, purdah, bazaar and chess. Tamil-curry. Chinese-tea. Japanese-judo and jujitsu. Malay-ketchup, sago and bamboo. Polynesian-taboo and tattoo. African languages-mumbo jumbo and voodoo. Caribbean-hammock, hurricane and tobacco. These are just a few examples of adaptations.”



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