

Lecture 1

History of English as a science

History of the language gives keys to many seeming inconsistencies of the language.

Plan

1. The subject matter of the History of the English language.
2. The purpose and tasks of the science. Its ties with other sciences.
3. The main periods in the history of the English language.
4. OE Alphabet and pronunciation.

Literature (Verba L. p. 6-18)

Main notions: synthetic, analytical, origin, invasion, levelling

Main dates: 449, 1066, 1475-6, 1485, 1660, 1876

Main names: Hengist, Horsa, Shakespeare, William the Conqueror, Alfred the Great, Henry Sweet

1. The subject matter of the History of the English language.

History of the English language is one of the fundamental courses forming the linguistic background of a specialist in philology. In studying the English language of today we are faced with a number of peculiarities which appear unintelligible from the modern point of view. These are found both in vocabulary and in the phonetic and grammatical structure of the language.

We cannot account for them from the point of view of contemporary English; we can only suppose that they are not a matter of chance and there must be some cause behind them. These causes belong to a more or less remote past and they can only be discovered by going into the history of the English language.

With adequate tools of investigation we still can trace all the changes within the language as a system. So the aim of the course is the investigation of the development of the English Language.

The subject matter of our course is the changing nature of the language through more than 15 hundred years of its existence. It studies the rise and development of English, its structure and peculiarities in the old days, its similarity to other languages of the same family and its unique specific features.

It starts with a view at the beginnings of the language, originally the dialects of a comparatively small number of related tribes that migrated from the continent onto the British Isles, the dialects of the Indo-European family – synthetic inflected language with a well-developed system of noun forms, a rather poorly represented system of verbal categories, with free word order and a vocabulary that consisted almost entirely of words of native origin. In phonology there was a strict subdivision of vowels into long and short, comparatively few diphthongs and an undeveloped system of consonants.

Mighty factors influenced the language converting it into the mainly analytical language of today, with scarcity of nominal forms and a verbal system that much

outweighs the systems of many other European languages. Its vowel system is rich, its vocabulary is enormous. Its spelling system is rather confusing.

2. The purpose and tasks of the science. Its ties with other sciences.

The purpose of our subject is a systematic study of the language development from the earliest time to the present day. Such study enables the students to acquire a more profound understanding of the language of today. Tasks^

- to state the facts and to find the causal ties between them;
- to explain the peculiarities of the modern language;
- to be able to explain the discrepancies;
- to analyse the systematic changes.

Study of the history of a concrete language is based on applying general principles of linguistics to the language in question. Foundations of our science are studied in introduction to linguistics (the general notions and categories).

To know the origin of the English language we should remember the introduction to special philology which gave the information about ancient Germanic languages and their structure.

The languages can be studied synchronically or diachronically. The structure of the language of any period whether it is the 20th or the 9th century can be studied as such. The complex study of a language of a certain period means its synchronic study. However, if we study one phenomenon at different times, for example the system of the English noun, it would yield a diachronic result. Saussure --
--- - all things at one time; | - one thing at diff. times

7 seofon – angl; gott – sibun; seven.

Both approaches are usually combined in special philology.

History of English is an important subsidiary discipline for history of England and of English literature. It is based on the history of England studying the development of the language in connection with the concrete conditions in which the English people lived in the several periods of their history. In our reference to history we are going to distinguish linguistically relevant historic events. It is also connected with disciplines studying present-day English – theoretical phonetics, grammar and lexicology.

3. The main periods in the history of the English language.

The first inhabitants of the British Isles were Celts – Britons and Gaels (family).

In 55 BC the Romans under Julius Caesar landed in Britain. Permanent Roman conquest began only in 43 AD by the emperor Claudius. The Romans subdued and colonized the country, established a lot of military camps, paved roads – completely transformed the aspect of the country. *It became a Roman province* in the 4th century the Christianity spread in Britain. In 410 the Roman legions were recalled from Britain to defend Italy from the advancing Goths under Alaric.

The English language is to a certain extent rare in the sense that we actually can find a starting point of its development. Its beginning can be traced back to the year 449, when coming to help their Celtic ally, Vortigern, two Germanic chieftains, Hengist and Horsa, (Jutes) brought their belligerent tribesmen to the Isles. The British resistance was stiff and the advance was brought to a standstill for nearly 50 years by a great battle won at Mount Badon. The inhabitants asked the Romans for help, but the Romans were too busy with their own battles with Germanic Barbarians. Historians attribute the resistance to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. 12 battles are mentioned in Latin chronicles. So that period was the starting point of the English language.

The conquerors settled in Britain in the following way. The Angles occupied most of the territory north of the Thames; the Saxons – the territory south of the Thames; the Jutes settled in Kent and in the Isle of Wight.

The invading Germanic tribes spoke similar languages, which in Britain developed into what we now call Old English. Old English did not sound or look like English today. Native English speakers now would have great difficulty understanding Old English. Nevertheless, about half of the most commonly used words in Modern English have Old English roots. The words *be*, *strong* and *water*, for example, derive from Old English. Old English was spoken until around 1100. In the 9th and 10th Century invaders from Scandinavia (the Vikings) occupied a large part of northern and eastern England. They introduced many everyday words in modern English. Many place names end in - "by", from their word for village (Whitby, Grimsby, Formby etc). Some words we use today from the Vikings are *sky*, *leg*, *call*, *take*, *dirt*, *law*, *are*, *take*, *cut*, *both*, *ill*, *ugly*, *egg*, *sister*, *window* and *get*.

The Western regions were held by the Britons: Cornwall was conquered in the 9th, Strathclyde in the 11th and Wales in the 13th century.

The Scottish Highlands where neither Romans nor Teutons had penetrated were inhabited by Picts and Scots. Ireland also remained Celtic until the 12th century.

The Old English period (written testimonies since 700) lasted till 1066 when the Norman leader William the Conqueror made a turn in the history of the country.

In 1066 William the Conqueror, the Duke of Normandy (part of modern France), invaded and conquered England. The new conquerors (called the Normans) brought with them a kind of French, which became the language of the Royal Court, and the ruling and business classes. For a period there was a kind of linguistic class division, where the lower classes spoke English and the upper classes spoke French. In the 14th century English became dominant in Britain again, but with many French words added. This language is called Middle English. It was the language of the great poet Chaucer (1340-1400), but it would still be difficult for native English speakers to understand today.

That was the beginning of the Middle English period. It lasted until 1475 (the introduction of print) or 1485 - the end of the war of Roses which marked the decay of feudalism and the rise of capitalism. Modern English period is subdivided into Early (1660) and Late.

Towards the end of Middle English, a sudden and distinct change in pronunciation (the Great Vowel Shift) started, with vowels being pronounced shorter and shorter. From the 16th century the British had contact with many peoples from around the world. This, and the Renaissance of Classical learning, meant that many new words and phrases entered the language. The invention of printing also meant that there was now a common language in print. Books became cheaper and more people learned to read. Printing also brought standardization to English. Spelling and grammar became fixed, and the dialect of London, where most publishing houses were, became the standard. In 1604 the first English dictionary was published.

Period	Years	Historical Event	Linguistic difference	Literature
Old	449 – 1066	Anglo-Saxon Conquest; Norman Conquest	Henry Sweet – the Period of Full Endings	Beowulf
Middle	1066 – 1475 (85)	war of Roses	Levelled Endings	Canterbury Tales
Modern Early Late	1475 1660 1876	Telephone, phonograph	Lost endings	Shakespeare

Anglo-Saxon

In the ninth century, thanks in part to the influence of Alfred the Great (Anglo-Saxon king of Wessex from 871 to 878), the western Saxon kings became the first sovereigns of all England and **West Saxon**, the dominant language of prose literature. Meanwhile, the Catholic church had continued to christianize the region and had brought back **Latin**. The resulting English was then further mixed with **Latin**, **Saxon**, and **Old Norse** words. Named after these German and Danish warriors, the Germanic language **Anglo-Saxon** represents the first period of English, or **Old English**. The Anglo-Saxon language of these peoples remained, however, fragmented into dialects. Linguistically, the Germanic kingdoms gave birth to the three major dialectal groups found in Old English:

- **West Saxon** (Wessex), as well as East Saxon and South Saxon
- Kentish (Kent)
 - **Anglian**, including Mercian and Northumbrian

The region occupied by the Anglians (*Angli* in Latin) was called *Anglia* and the language *Englisc* (whence *English*). The **Jutes** arrived from Denmark and settled mainly in Kent, while the **Saxons** remained in the region that still bears their name (*Sussex*: Southern Saxons; *Wessex*: Western Saxons; *Essex*: Eastern Saxons).

Meanwhile, the **Angles** took over the area from the shores of the Thames to the Scottish Lowlands. This geographic dispersion explains in part the diversity of Old English dialects: **West Saxon, South Saxon, East Saxon, Kentish, Mercian,** and **Northumbrian**, the last two making up **Anglian**. The alphabet then in use is called the *Runic Alphabet*

Loan Words

By comparison with modern English, the Old English (or Anglo-Saxon) vocabulary appears rather limited today, with approximately 24,000 lexical units to at least 500,000 in contemporary English, if not more than one million. Old English was influenced by Old Norse, Celtic, Latin, and certain Scandinavian languages.

Old Norse

Much of the vocabulary of Old English and Old Norse was identical, though intercomprehension between the two languages was not a given. Today's English has roughly one million words that can be traced to ancient Scandinavian origins through Old Norse: *bag, birth, bread, cake, to die, egg, happy, husband, law, to lift, root, same, to seem, sky*, etc.

Celtic Languages

Borrowings from certain Celtic root words gave rise to some doublets in standard English: whole/hale, no/nay, shirt/skirt, scream/screech, edge/egg. Old English also borrowed some proper nouns from Celtic languages (Belfast, Cardiff, Dublin, Glasgow, Avon, etc.) as well as many common nouns, such as bannock, cart, down, and mattock. Most modern English words with Celtic origins—from Welsh, Scots Gaelic, or Irish—are fairly recent loan words.

Latin

Already at the time, words with Latin origins were numerous —there were roughly 150 of them. Many actually derived from Greek: altar, mass, priest, psalm, pear, etc. Most of these words—often religious terms—were introduced through the spread of Christianity. At this time, members of the clergy and scholars used Latin, and scientists readily used Greek. This Latinization of English enriched the language with many words and gave a "Mediterranean flavour" to the "Nordic language," or a "Latin flavour" to the "Germanic language."

Scandinavian Languages

There were also about forty words of Scandinavian origin introduced by the Vikings during their many invasions of Britain: are, take, cut, both, ill, ugly, etc. Of course the writing underwent numerous changes, but one can still recognize certain words: *deor* (deer), *scort* (short), *disc* (dish), *môna* (moon), *sunne* (sun). Although some Old English words are unrecognizable due to their Celtic appearance: *eorðe* (earth), *cniht* (knight), *cyning* (king), *wicu* (week), *gærs* (grass), *costung* (temptation), many survived and remain almost intact today: feet, geese, teeth, men, women, lice, mice, etc. In the early 11th century, Old English was a language that, despite its Celtic and Greco-Latin influences, remained firmly Germanic. Linguistic transformations of the next

period, however, would produce an Anglo-Saxon unrecognizable in relation to the preceding one.

Questions for discussion

1 The subject matter of the History of the English language and its connection with other sciences.

2 The main periods and events in the history of English: a short history of the origins and development of English

3 A short history of the origins and development of English: write about five events that shaped the History of English

4 Write about five events that shaped the History of English

5 What are the greatest events that stand out clearly among the highlights in the history of the English language?