

## 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 20<sup>th</sup> or the 9<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> 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 9<sup>th</sup>, Strathclyde in the 11<sup>th</sup> and Wales in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The Scottish Highlands where neither Romans nor Teutons had penetrated were inhabited by Picts and Scots. Ireland also remained Celtic until the 12<sup>th</sup> 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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<br>Early<br>Late | 1475<br>1660<br>1876 | Telephone,<br>phonograph                | Lost endings                             | Shakespeare      |