

(The) Future of English Language

TANMOY KUNDU

Research Scholar
Fakir Mohan University
India

KRIPASINDHU LAYEK

Assistant Teacher
India

In the fifth century groups of west Germania Speakers Angles, Saxons and Jutes entered Britain to help the native Celts defend themselves against the Picts and the Scots who were invading from the North-West after the withdrawal of the Roman legions around 410 A.D. The language spoken by the Angles, the Saxons and the jutes was Old English. The old English may be categorised into four dialects – Northumbrian, Mercian, West Germanic and Old Kentish. All Extant Old English literature was written the West Saxon dialect and dated 700 A.D.

The language changed much around 1100 and from that time on to about 1500 A.D. it is referred as Middle English period. In this period English surnames developed. We may trace this as the beginning of Standard English. In this period Caxton invents printing press and this helps increase the importance of London-speech.

From sixteenth century to date we may refer to as The Modern English period. In this period the British sea-power increases and explorations result in adoption from many other languages. During the seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries colonial empire grows and colonies in America are founded.

More words are adopted into English. New words adopted or created as a result of science, also as a result of the spread of industry; local dialects weakened in this period by industry. During the 18th century experimental science developed and scholars and writers of this period try and create a standardised grammar for England. In the 19th and 20th centuries universal education develops. Newspapers, radio, television and the cinema improve communication and for this local dialects began to weaken. Growth of some spelling, pronunciations are in this period and Americanism continues so far the history of the English language concern. Now we shall try to note the borrowings the language from different sources.

As regards the nature of words borrowed from the Scandinavian s nothing definite can be said. Words about searoving and battles such as *barda* (a beaked ship), *carearr* (a war ship), *Orrest* (battle) which were borrowed do not concern us for they are not, living today. There were many more similar borrowings – Scandinavian words which are found in early Middle English but became obsolete soon afterwards. *Hoefn* (heaven), *sweyen* (as in boatswain) are a few exceptions.

Scandinavians imposed their own law on the English in the following words e.g. *lagu* (law), *utlaga* (outlaw), *feslaga* (fellow) etc. Miscellaneous name- words like *anger*, *bank*, *birth*, *calf*, *ear*, *knife*, *sister*, *skin*, *skirt*, *window*, and *wing* are all supposed to have come from the Scandinavian source. Diverse adjectives like *awkward*, *flat*, *happy*, *ill*, *low*, *meeek*, *odd* and verbs of everyday use such as *bask*, *call*, *cast*, *die*, *gape*, *gasp*, *get*, *give*, *guess*, *take*, *want* etc. and adverbs like *aloft* and *altwart* are Scandinavian. Pronouns, prepositions and conjugations which are not generally borrowed by one nation from another came from Scandinavian to English e.g. *they*, *them* and *their* replaced the O.E. *hie* (or *hi*), *him* and *hiera*. *Fro* (for from) and *till* (in our modern sense) are also due to Scandinavian influence. The Scandinavians were scattered in England widely. The place names ending in- *by*, *thorp*, *thwaite*, *beck* etc. show that. By making ‘a town’ occurs in the compound

word by-law which properly means 'law for the administration of town', - son in personal names like Jackson, Robinson also points to a Scandinavian origin.

In some cases the old English word remained but the sense was Scandinavian. Thus, dream in OE meant 'joy', 'bloom' meant 'a man of molten metal', bread was 'a fragrant'. These words are used to the Scandinavian sense instead of original English sense.

A few words like sister, birth, boon, get, gift, which had similar, though not quite the same sound in the old English and Scandinavian sound and form. Commonness in words like brother, care, come, folk, ground, see, sit, makes it rather difficult to say with certainty whether some words which now have English were originally English or were borrowed from Scandinavian, We may feel tempted to jump to the conclusion that it is a Scandinavian borrowing. Jespersen is justified when he remarks, "an Englishman can not thrive or be ill or die without Scandinavian words, they are to the language what bread and eggs are to the daily fare".

French was the important influence on the English language during the Middle English period. With the nobility and the clergy speaking French, French naturally became the language in France. Sometimes good English words were discarded and replaced by their French equivalents. Thus wig, sigge gave way to war, victory. Dema was replaced by judge, firen by crime, leod by people and so on. Sometimes both have survived, such as help and aid, hearty and cordial, happiness and felicity, wedding and marriage etc.

Generally, the English took from the French only those words for which they left a need. Illustrations of French loan element relating to some important departments are as follows: social rank – king, empress, page, queen, baron, count, duke, peer, prince are all French.

Many words relating to war, government and Administration of Justice are also of French origin. Examples are arms, assault, banner, battle, castle, march, seize, soldier, troops etc.

Feudalism and Knight-Errantry wholly and church extensively took words from French. Feudalism (itself a French word) gave us allegiance, fief, homage, liege and vessel. Knight-Errantry is responsible for such words as chivalry, courage, honour, loyalty, valour and courteous.

In the field of Arts, Trades and Occupations also words were heavily borrowed from the French. Painting gave colour, design, figure, image, ornament etc. ; music (which is French) brought chant, chord, harmony, sound, tone, tune, etc. ;tailoring (tailor is a French word) gave apparel, costume, dress and garment and boil, fry, felly, soup, roast, toast etc. are from working; and brace, leash, falcon, scent etc. are from hunting and hawking.

The following French words (nouns, adjectives, verbs) in English chosen at random will prove the variety and universality of the borrowing:

Nouns – action, age, air, aunt, beast, chance, debt, ease, grief, nephew, point, uncle, season etc.

Adjectives - able, active, brief, calm, chief, gentle, honest, large, simple etc.

Verbs – allow, apply, arrange, arrive, reply, serve, turn, wait etc.

Latin and Greek have also influenced the English for terms of metaphysics and different sciences. The word philology, itself is of Greek origin. So also are metaphysics and psychology. Names of almost all sciences like chemistry, physics, botany, biology, astronomy are Greek in their origin.

Greek has influenced the nomenclature in science. Geology was originally earth-lore (a literal translation of geology) in England but earth-lover was felt to be too vague and was soon given up.

The English have borrowed words from various countries whenever they went and from whatever people they mixed with. For this we may call the English language omnivorous. It has the capacity to borrow and absorb words from foreign tongues.

Now it must be referred some of the other languages from which the English borrowed.

Italy – race, artisan, gondola, cameo, stanza, balcony, corridor etc.

Spain – Negro, potato, comrade, mosquito, esplanade etc.

Portugal – pagoda, buffalo, mandarin etc.

Dutch –boor, snuff, aloof, hop, brandy, sketch, landscape etc.

German – Waltz, yodel, seminar, kindergarten, blitzkrieg etc.

Russian – steppe, rouble, vodka, bolshevik, sputniketc,
Czech – Tobot

Hungary – hussar, shako

Turkey – bey and fez

Persia – altar, bazaar, caravan, chess etc.

Arabic – algebra, almanac, elixit, zenith etc.

India – calico, pundit, bungalow, jungle, cutcha, pucca, rajah etc,

Malay – bamboo, sago etc.

China – tea and kotow

Japan – Kimono

Africa – Gorilla and chimpanzee

Australia – boomerang.

Last but not the least important borrowings in the English language are from America. English and the speech of the United States which is with universal acceptance but less accurately called American English were originally the same. But in the long three centuries after settlement both the languages have shown divergent tendencies which have made them dissimilar in vocabulary, pronunciation structure in foundation. The different condition of living in the United States and more particularly due to the absorption of many immigrants of different nationality and language, American English have developed certain tendency, which have not, until

recently, found much favour in England. For example, politician has a disparaging sense in America which it does not yet carry in England ; solicitor means a canvasser or a visiting agent or beggar in America and clerk more often means shop-assistant than anyone else.

One difference between English and American English is in Vocabulary. To understand this differentiation of vocabulary, let us take an imaginary incident in the fashion of Simeon Potter or A.C. Bough. Let us assume that English arrives for the first time to the United States. He may decide to continue his journey by rail i.e. railroad. He does not register his luggage, but he checks his luggage which is then placed not in the luggage-van, but in the baggage-car. In this manner, we may come to meet with so many words which are otherwise expressed in England, such as engineer- driver, conductor-guard, and motor car-street-car. But it is, of course, on the level of more colloquial or popular speech that the greatest difficulties are noticed. English and American English showed almost open hostility to each other. But such hostility is giving way to greater adoptability and a sense of accommodation. It is, however, certain that American English has very considerably influenced British English, and this has been due to a far, wider set of circumstances than the mere fact of America, leading position, in commerce, the films and finance, though there have proved a body of slang in England. Some of which has already penetrated to god colloquial usage. Words associated with American things have been accepted fairly, readily, such as telephone, type-writer etc.

In the fifteenth century the long vowels underwent a change known as the Great Vowel Shift. “the result was an irregular patterning of vowels, and the shift itself involved a general raising in the mouth, of all long vowels. Since [i] and [u] could be diphthongized....”

Marckwardt lays stress on geographical spread of English. “The uniqueness of English, however, lies in its geographical spread. It is spoken as a first or native language on four continents of

the globe, a distribution that is unparalleled in any of the other language of wider communication”.

Pei anticipates a combination of British and American phonetic habits. He adds that syntactical changes will be few. According to him English in the mid-20th century will be ‘difficult’ for the English speakers. “... the English language of the two hundred years hence will be likely to represent a merger of British and American phonetic habits, with comparatively little in the way of morphological or syntactical innovations, but with a turnover in vocabulary and semantics that would make it difficult, not to say incomprehensible, to the English speaker of today”.

Baugh differs from others and does not think that the differences in pronunciation among the varied English users will ever be standardized or reduced. “So far as the spoken language is concerned, it is too much to expect that the marked differences of pronunciation that distinguished the speech let us say, England, Australia and the United States will ever be reduced to one uniform mode”.

The English language is ever-changing. The minute observer detects its drift and slope and can perceive the future and also to forecast the modifications of the next few centuries. English is likely to remain the most widespread language in the world but its influence largely depends on the English-speaking people. As in the past, in the future also, it will shape and adapt itself to meet new needs, when every speaker and writer will play some part. Thus Potter, “Our language is rich in diphthongs, but many are unstable. They are slowly but surely being transmuted on the lips of the young, Diphthongs tend to become long vowel; long vowel tends to be shortened”.

Jespersen merely predicts an increase in the number of English users in the world tomorrow. “Whatever the remote future may have in store, one need not be a great prophet to predict that in near future the number of English-speaking people will increase considerably”.

Potter predicts the dropping of the definite article from titles of books and periodicals in a mass scale. Also, 'spelling pronunciation' 'must' is also expected by him to do duty for 'necessity'. 'This is a must' for this is an utter necessity'. "With its personal appeal, its pleasing rhythm and its emphatic cadence, it has the highest verbal' value. It is far more potent and cogent than, say, 'For you this is an utter necessity'".

The world is shrinking and humanity coming together in such a way as English will certainly demand a world-language status in a century or so. Many forces working today are in favour of English, they will have to be strengthened and canalized. A joint effort by the British Councils and the United States Information Service Centres through out the world can do it fruitfully and play a vital role in the emergence of English as the common language of the world of tomorrow. The location of the offices of the U.N.O.H.Q. in the States has a catalytic effect on that great emergence, probably.

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