

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE: A BRIEF HISTORY

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by Thomas Pyles

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まえがき

本書は *Aspects of English* というシリーズの一冊として、*The Dictionary and Usage; Concise Handbook of Grammar; Adventures with Words* などと共に、米国の高校生向に執筆されたもので、著者の Thomas Pyles (1905-) は Northwestern 大学の英語及び言語学の教授 (1966-) であり、*Words and Ways of American English* (1952), *The Origins and Development of the English Language* (1966; Second ed., 1971), *English: An Introduction to Language* (1970) など知られた英語学者である。高校レベルの授業に英語史を導入する試みが最近米国で行なわれている (Joseph E. Milosh, Jr., *Teaching the History of the English Language in the Secondary Classroom*, 1972 参照) が、そうした方向に沿ってこの著名な学者が豊かな学識を簡潔にまとめただけに、ここには英語発展の重要ポイントが印欧時代から OE, ME を経て現代に至るまで、発音・綴字・文法・語彙などにわたって、平易な文体で巧みに叙述されている。

英語を内的歴史と外的歴史に分けていえば、本書は後者への言及をむしろ限定して、英語そのものの起源と発達の諸相を小冊子の割には相当詳しく解説している。この立場は *Origins* の場合と同じであるが、本書42ページの *Except for its word stock, it is likely that English would have developed as it has done even if there had never been a Norman Conquest* 以下のことばにうかがわれる見解の反映ともいえよう。いずれにせよ、英語の歴史を学ぶ上では、英語そのものの変化の具体的事実を基本的な点で把握することが優先すべきであろう。その場合、現代英語との関係で OE, ME を見るのが、言語事実とその変化の有様を的確に理解するのに有効であるが、本書もその観点から OE の部分に最も多くのページを当てている。また各所に古い写本などの興味ある図版を入れ、理解を深める設

間 (Florida 大学の Jayne C. Harder の手になる) を添えている。

ところでいわゆる自然言語が社会的であるのはもちろん、歴史言語 (historical language) でもあるという事実に今日もっと注意が払われるべきであろう。益々変化を速める世界の動向を先ず的確にとらえるには、今日の人間を築いた歴史を知ることが大事であるが、中でもそれ自体一つの文化現象でありながら、他のすべての文化の最も根底的な基礎となっている言語について、歴史を学ぶことは、その構造・機能を知ることと共に、人間・文化・社会を総体的に把握するための最も基礎的な作業となるのではないか。なるほど言語史は政治史・経済史・思想史などとは異なり、その知識を直接現代社会の諸事象と関連させて、これを解明し論じることを容易に可能にするような「実利性」には乏しいであろうが、かえってこのことが情報の氾濫する社会に対して貴重な価値をもつと思う。本書は英語の歴史の基本的事項を扱う小冊子に過ぎないが、数年以上も英語を学んできた者にとって、現在事実上国際語といえる言語の歴史を知ることが、それ自体興味深いことであり、さらに上述のような理由もあって、あえて英文科学生のみならず、一般教養の学生にも一読を勧める次第である (もっと個別的な理由については上記 Milosh の本 pp. 18-28 やブルームフィールド; ニューマーク『英語史』〔英宝社〕 pp. 22-24 参照)。

注解に当っては多くの辞典・著書の恩恵を受けた。とりわけ、著者の意図を一層明確にするためなどに、前記の *Origins* 及び *English* を引用その他にしばしば利用させて頂いた。注釈上の間違い・不備を予想し恐れているが、各方面からの御教示を乞う。

昭和 48 年 1 月

東 信 行

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The Tale of The Nunys prest

And here begynnyth his tale



A Houre bydolb som dele y slept in age
Was somtyme dwellyng in a cotage
Beside a groue stondyng in a dale
This bydolb of which I telle you my tale
Syn that day that she was last a wyf
In pacience ledde a ful symple lyf
For tytil was her catel and her rent
By husbondry of such as god her sent
She fonde her self and eke her doughteryn thoo
The large solbys had she andy nomo
The kyne e eek a sheep that hight make
Wel sofy was her flour andy eke her halle
In which she eet many a slender meel
Of poynaunt salve ne knelbe she neuer steel
Ne deynre moxal passedy thorough her throate

E iii

OPENING PAGE OF "THE TALE OF THE NUN'S PRIEST" FROM AN EARLY EDITION OF *THE CANTERBURY TALES*, BY GEOFFREY CHAUCER

EARLY HISTORY

The ancestry of English, like that of all other languages, is immeasurably ancient, though of course our language has not always been called English; it is a development of an unrecorded language called Germanic, just as Italian is a development of an amply recorded language called Latin. * Both Latin and Germanic are, as we shall see, developments of a language spoken even earlier. The fact that we have written records of Sumerian, or Chinese, or Egyptian—or for that matter, of languages related to English, like Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin—which are much older than any writings in English or any other Germanic language obviously does not * mean that these languages are any older, but simply that the peoples who spoke them learned to write earlier. The invention of writing systems is a matter of cultural, not linguistic, history; for writing is not really language, but only a symbolic representation of it.

SPEECH AND WRITING

There is, however, no sensible objection to our speaking of “written * language” so long as we do not confuse writing with speech, as, for instance, we do when we think in terms of the “sounds of letters”; for letters do not have sounds, but are merely arbitrary representations of them which have been made in one way or another on some such surface as stone, clay, bone, wood, metal, parchment, or paper. The oldest known writing

goes back no more than about five thousand years, though people had been talking for hundreds of thousands of years before that.

THE CONTINENTAL BACKGROUNDS

English is the name by which we refer to a particular development of Germanic from about the mid-fifth century, beginning with the migration of warrior-adventurers from the North German Plain, including the southern part of Jutland (modern Schleswig-Holstein) to the more or less abandoned Roman colony which the Romans called Britannia, that is, Britain. The withdrawal of the Roman legionaries early in the fifth century left the Britons, a Celtic people, at the mercy of marauding Picts from the North (modern Scotland) and Scots from the West (modern Ireland). The Picts and the Scots were also Celts: a good many ancient Scots migrated from Ireland to the northern part of Britain, which they called *Scotia*; the Picts, those who were already there, ultimately gave up their form of British Celtic speech, called Pictish, and spoke the Gaelic variety of Celtic, which is why the language spoken in the remoter Scottish Highlands is sometimes called *Erse*, a variant of *Irish*.

The Britons appealed with little success to Rome for help. They then turned to Germanic sea-raiders with whom they had already had some contact. These vigorous people responded to the call, gave the Picts and the Scots their comeuppance, and then high-handedly proceeded to take over for themselves what had been Roman Britain. Today descendants of the ancient British live in Wales and Cornwall and across the Channel in Brittany, whither their ancestors fled to escape the onslaughts of those whose aid they had somewhat naïvely sought.

Ultimately the name of a single Germanic tribe, the *Angli*, later becoming *Engle*, was to become a national name in *Englaland* 'Angles' land,' later *England*. The highly similar Germanic dialects spoken by all—Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Frisians, and doubtless some Franks as well—came likewise to be thought of and referred to as *Englisc*, that is, *English*. The language of the earliest period (A.D. 449–1100) was usually called *Anglo-Saxon* a generation or so ago, but this term was not used by those who spoke the language in any of its dialects and has been almost entirely given up by

modern scholars, who refer to it as *Old English*. Those who spoke it are, however, frequently called Anglo-Saxons, that is, English Saxons, to distinguish them from the "Old Saxons" whom they had left behind on the Continent of Europe.

THE INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

- * The Germanic language out of which Old English developed was itself a development of a language spoken in yet earlier prehistoric times, called Indo-European by modern scholars. Practically all the languages of Europe and the Americas (exceptions are Basque, Estonian, Finnish, Lappish, Hungarian, Turkish, and the various American Indian languages) are
- * also developments of Indo-European, sharing certain characteristics in their system of sounds (phonology) and inflections (morphology) as well as a number of words called *cognates* (from Latin *co* plus [*g*] *nātus* 'born together'). Speakers of Indo-European in very early times, perhaps as early as the latter centuries of the third millennium B.C., migrated to Asia
- * and settled in India and the Iranian Plateau; their speech ultimately became differentiated as Indic (whence Sanskrit and other languages of India) and Persian, or Iranian. The language of the Gypsies, Romany, is an Indic dialect, a fact not known for a long time after their first appearance in Europe, when they were thought to be Egyptians—whence the name
- * given to them. Other Asiatic Indo-European languages are Armenian, Hittite, and Tocharian. The two latter have long been extinct. The texts upon which our knowledge of them is based were discovered respectively in Asia Minor and Chinese Turkestan in the early years of the present century.
- * Indo-European languages spoken in Europe include Albanian, the Baltic languages (Lithuanian, Latvian, and the now extinct Prussian), the Slavic languages (Russian, Polish, Czech, Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, and Slovenian), Greek, the Italic (Romance) languages (modern developments of Latin, such as Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Rumanian), and, most important for us, the Germanic languages. These last consist of a North Germanic (Scandinavian) group (Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Icelandic, and Faroese); an East Germanic group, whose

only representative of which we have any considerable knowledge is the now extinct Gothic; and a West Germanic group, which includes Low German (*Plattdeutsch*), Dutch, Flemish, Frisian, English, and High German.

THE POSITION OF GERMANIC IN THE INDO-EUROPEAN GROUP

The relationship of the Germanic group to the other Indo-European * languages may be illustrated by a comparison of the words corresponding to *two* and *three* in various Germanic and non-Germanic Indo-European languages, thus:

GERMANIC	OTHER INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES
<i>English</i> two, three	<i>Sanskrit (Indic)</i> dvau, trayas
<i>High German</i> zwei, drei	<i>Latin (Italic)</i> duo, trēs
<i>Icelandic</i> tvö, þrír*	<i>Greek</i> dyo, treis
<i>Dutch</i> twee, drie	<i>Russian (Slavic)</i> dva, tri
<i>Swedish</i> två, tre	<i>Welsh (Celtic)</i> dau, tri
<i>Gothic</i> twai, þreis	<i>Lithuanian (Baltic)</i> du, trys

Leaving differences in vowels out of the question, we must make allowances for certain more or less slight consonantal differences, as follows: * the early Germanic sound written *th* in *three*, corresponding to Indo-European *t*, is retained only in English and Icelandic, having later shifted to *d* or *t* in the other Germanic languages; the Germanic initial *t* corresponding to Indo-European *d* shifted to *ts* (written *z*) in High German; English *two* has lost the *w* sound still preserved in the spelling. Despite * these differences, the correspondences must be apparent to even the most naked eye. Similar ones might be shown for the other numerals, for words denoting family relationships (*father, mother, brother, sister*), and for scores of other common, everyday words. From such regular correspondences, which might be demonstrated for grammar as well as for sounds, it follows

that the languages which are designated Indo-European are developments of a single original, just as we might assume from their common characteristics that French, Spanish, Italian, and the other Romance languages developed later from a single tongue, Latin, which was, as we have seen, *itself a development of Indo-European. To put it in another way, the Romance languages are more similar to one another than they are to, say, English or Russian or Gaelic, to which they have a more remote relationship.

An important factor is that, whereas Latin is amply attested in a voluminous literature, Germanic, doubtless spoken up to shortly before the beginning of the Christian Era, was not recorded by those who spoke it. Consequently Germanic, like Indo-European, must be reconstructed from a careful comparison of those derivative languages of which we do possess records. Even so, one would have no hesitation in concluding on *the basis of the forms which have just been cited that the Germanic word for the second and third numerals began respectively with the sounds symbolized in Modern English by *tw* and *thr*, and that the Indo-European words began with *d* (actually with *dw*) and *tr*. When scholars cite reconstructed forms, they give notice of the fact by placing a superior asterisk * in front of them: thus we may write that the Indo-European forms of the cited numerals were **dwo* and **treies* respectively, even though these words were never written at all.

SPECIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN GERMANIC

Prehistoric developments which took place in Germanic alone among the Indo-European languages and which are reflected in Modern English *include (1) the formation of a past tense form by means of a suffix containing a dental stop (*d* or *t*), as in *live*, *lived* (compare German *leben* 'to live,' *lebte* 'lived'); (2) the reduction of tense forms to two, a present and a past; (3) the regular placement of stress on root syllables (contrast the related English *brótherly* and Latin *fratérnal*); (4) the regular change of Indo-European *p*, *t*, and *k* to *f*, *þ*, and *h*, respectively, and likewise of Indo-European *bh*, *dh*, and *gh* to *b*, *d*, and *g* and of Indo-European *b*, *d*, and *g* to *p*, *t*, and *k*—each series of changes being completed long before the next began;

and (5) the occurrence of a number of words whose source cannot be traced to any Indo-European origin, though they may be survivals of words which once existed in Indo-European and have subsequently been lost everywhere save in the Germanic group. Germanic also developed a second, so-called weak adjective declension; this has happily been lost in *English, but is very much alive in German, as every student of that language is aware. It is used mainly after the demonstrative pronoun and the definite article which developed from the demonstrative pronoun.

QUESTIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS

1. Which is the older, writing or speaking? How much older? Can we establish whether one language is older than another by comparing the dates of their earliest written forms? If not, how can the relative age of a language be established?
2. What is the relationship between letters and sounds? If your dictionary has an alphabet table, find examples to support your answer.
3. With what historical event do we associate the beginning of the English * language? Approximately when did it occur?
4. What are the earliest speakers of English called? Why have they been so designated? What tribes comprised the early speakers of English? Where had they come from?
5. On a diagram such as the one below, place the following languages in * the appropriate places:

Sanskrit	Swedish	Portuguese	Slovenian
Russian	English	Frisian	Dutch
Spanish	Hittite	Romany	Low German
Tocharian	Armenian	High German	Faroese
Persian	Rumanian	French	Icelandic
Danish	Norwegian	Italian	Gothic
Lithuanian	Latvian	Bulgarian	Prussian
Polish	Czech	Flemish	Serbo-Croatian