

PAPER 7 (HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS)

Discuss the linguistic ground on which English language is grouped with Germanic languages.

English is widely spoken in all six continents and has a strong effect in regions in which it is not the principle spoken language. The widely diffused English speaking community is fairly stable in Britain, Asia, North America and Australia. In Africa the Indian sub-continent and South-east Asia its future remains uncertain and unpredictable. People who speak English fall into three categories:

- A. Those who have inherited it as their native language.
- B. Those who have acquired it as a second language within a society that is largely bilingual.
- C. Those who are driven by necessity to use it for some practical purpose- administrative, professional or educational.

One person out of every seven in the world now belongs to one of the three groups mentioned above. English belongs to the Indo-European family of language and is therefore related to most other languages spoken in Europe and western Asia from Iceland to Asia. The parent tongue called "Proto-Indo-European" was spoken about 5000 years ago by Nomads believed to have roamed the Southeast European plains. Icelandic, which has changed little over the last thousand years, is the living language most nearly resembling Old English in grammatical structure. It should be noticed that when using the term Indo-European it means simply the people who spoke that particular language and indicates nothing whatsoever about this race, about which nothing was clearly known, not even whether it was a pure race or a mixture of races.

Certainly there can be little doubt of the outstanding importance of English among the languages of the world. It is not the one used by the greatest number of native speakers, an honor that belongs to the national language of China, and spoken by about 650,000,000 people. But English has more than 250,000,000 native speakers and is far more wide spread than Chinese. It is spoken throughout the continents of the world and in addition it is the language of commerce and the second language of many countries which formerly had French or Greek in that position.

The English language has changed during the 1300 years of its existence. As in all living languages, change has been gradual but continuous and the present language is the result of centuries of development. This is not surprising. Any change in the action of the vocal organs will result in a difference of sound, with the result that each individual is constantly, if unconsciously, varying from the norm. Under such circumstances, there can be no such thing as uniformity in speech. Not only will the speech of one community differ from that of another, but within the same community the speech of individuals will differ. Such individual variations within the community will nevertheless necessarily be slight because of the restrictive influence of social intercourse and in any given community at any particular time there will be a general similarity in the speech. Since any living language is merely the sum total of a number of speech communities, it will naturally change as the language of the individual speaker changes. But although change is inherent in a living language, it does not conform to a regular and uniform pattern just as all living languages consist of a number of different dialects, so

that the languages themselves are but the result of centuries of developments, and were themselves at an earlier period merely a dialect.

The chief characteristic of English why it is called to be Germanic is analytical and not like the earlier languages of the IE family which were relatively inflected.

1. In English only nouns, pronouns and verbs are inflected.
2. English suffixes have no syntactic functions.
3. It is the only European language to employ uninflected objectives, e.g. the tall man.
4. English is strongly stressed. There are four degrees of stress in it:
(a) primary (b) secondary (c) tertiary (d) weak
5. If the verb 'ride' of the modern English is compared with the corresponding word in Old English, it will be found that modern English has only five forms (ride, rides, rode, riding, and ridden), whereas Old English 'riden' has thirteen forms.
6. There is flexibility of function. This has grown over the last few centuries as consequence of the loss of inflections. Words formerly distinguished as nouns or verbs by differences in their forms are now often used as both nouns and verbs. One can speak, for example, of planning a 'table' or 'tablong', a plan 'booking a place' or 'placing a book'.
7. There is an openness of vocabulary of words. This implies both free admission of words from other languages and the ready creation of compounds and derivatives. English adopts (without change or with slight change) any word really needed to some new object or to denote some new process like French, Spanish and Russian, English frequently forms scientific words/terms from classical Greek word elements.

DEFECTS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

English possesses a system of orthography, that does not always accurately reflect the pronunciation of words.

English is now accepted as an analytical language. Jespersen says, "this analytic process has meant unqualified progress in the language. S. Porter observes that this analytic progress in the English language is both gain and loss."

The history of English is sub-divided into three categories:

1. Old English - 450 AD to 1100 AD
2. Middle English - 1100 AD to 1500 AD
3. Modern English - 1500 AD onwards.