
Unit 1 □ What is Language ? History of Language

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1.1. What is Language ?

It is Language that distinguishes a man from the rest of the animal world. Earlier it was common to define man as a thinking animal but, can we imagine thought without any language ?

Again man has often been described as a tool-making animal, but Language itself is the most remarkable tool that man has invented, and is one that makes all others possible. The most primitive tools, perhaps have come earlier than language. The higher apes are seen to use a stick for digging. They are also seen to break sticks. But sophisticated tools certainly demand human cooperation and division of labour and division of labour is not possible without language. Language, in fact is the great machine tool which makes human culture possible.

Animals communicate with one another by means of cries. Many birds utter a warning call at the approach of dangers. Some animals utter different cries expressing anger, fear, pleasure etc. These various means of communication differ in important ways from human language. Animal cries are not articulate and they lack structure. They are general in meaning and the number of calls is limited, whereas in human language, the number of human utterances is infinite.

A human language is a signalling system as it uses vocal sounds. We must remember that basically a language is something which is spoken. The written language is secondary and is derivative because speech is learned before writing. There are some primitive communities that have speech without writing, but we can not think of a human society which has a written language without a spoken one. The sign language of the hearing impaired are not exceptions to this rule.

1.2. A World without Language

When the world was first created no one knew how to talk. Human beings had to learn to speak, just as little babies must learn to speak. How would it be if mankind were still speechless ? The world would be a different world then, wouldn't it ? The world we live in now is what it is, only because people can talk and write. In a world where no one can talk or write,

there would be no knowledge, and without knowledge there would be no civilization. Men might live in groups for protection from wild animals, but there would be no cities, no tall buildings, no buildings at all whatsoever except very simple ones. People would travel only short distances because they would be afraid to, having no one to tell them what lay beyond their sight, or they would have no means of transportation—no cars, no trains, no aeroplanes, no ships.

You might grow food for your own needs, but you would have to eat only what would grow in the climate of the place where you live in – the list of foods you would not have, would be a very long list. Your clothes would be made of bark and leaves or the skins of animals, and a skin would be your blanket. There would be no industry, so whatever you would use, would have to be made by yourself. So man would be living almost as an animal. But man is a man and not an animal, because he walks upright. He has a human brain, and what is most important, he can talk. Language is the greatest achievement of the human race.

What would you do about your emotions if you could not talk about them ? Not much. Your curiosity could be satisfied only by looking and remembering, because no one could tell you, for instance, what makes it rain. In a speechless world you can not even make up a reason in your head, because words are needed for reasoning.

No, it wouldn't be fun at all not to be able to talk. There would still be love in the world, but there would also be deep fear and bewilderment and worry that originate from ignorance. There would still be hunting and fishing and games, but there would be no singing or story-telling or reading. In a way life would be a perpetual holiday, because you wouldn't have to go to school. But you would have so many unanswered questions in your mind.

Activity–A

1. In what way is human language different from animal language ?
2. Give reasons to establish the superiority of Man's communicating ability to that of animal.

Discussion :

You are in a country where people communicate in whistles and gestures. How would you communicate in such a society ? Would it be possible ?

1.3. The Beginning of Language

Let us imagine that we are living in a world where no one can talk. We are living in a cave with our parents and relatives. Our bed of skins is at the side of the cave where the roof is very low to meet the floor. The roof then is close above you. At night you crawl into your bed very

carefully so that you don't hit your head. In the morning when you wake up, full of energy, you quickly sit up—with a bang ! because you have forgotten how low the roof is and have hit your head on it hard. A second before you hit, but too late, your father made a sharp sound of warning—let us say it was 'dhop'. The next morning, just as you wake up and you're about to sit up, your father says, 'Dhop' ! again. You remember the day before, you remember hitting your head, you feel the bump with your fingers, so you crawl out slowly to where the roof of the cave is higher before you sit up. After that you always remember about the low roof, and your father does not need to say 'Dhop!' to you any more for that.

Again, after a couple of days, let's say you are walking with your father. He is ahead of you and suddenly he makes the same sound, 'Dhop!' but this time in a low voice. The sound isn't exactly a word yet, but it does have a meaning to you. You remember the other times your father said it—those times it meant, 'Don't keep on moving or you will get hurt.' When he gave the warning in the cave it was loud. But here it is in a soft voice because he doesn't want anyone else to hear the sound excepting you. You do not think all this in words, because so far you have no real words, but you feel it. Anyway, you stop and hold still. And then you see a huge, hairy rhinoceros with a dangerous-looking tusk. You stand there behind your father, perfectly still, almost holding your breath. Finally you watch the animal, grub around for some roots, eats them, and slowly goes away. Only then you move.

Now your father has come to realize that his warning exclamation can be very useful. If you and the whole family will always stop moving when he says 'dhop', he can keep you out of danger and trouble which is common in the primitive world. When he first said 'dhop!' it was a cry. Now after making the same sound in different situations and seeing the same reaction, he resolves to teach it to the whole family, and so it has become a word.

That may have been the way the first word was invented. Then when other words had been invented and proved to be useful too, more and more words began to be invented by the people. We can guess that necessary words came first, eg. warnings, commands, names of things and actions—and later on abstract words—names for ideas and emotions.

It may be possible that Language was invented according to need. But it is also possible that language was invented for fun. Imagine once again that you are living in the time when no one could talk. There are all sorts of sounds in the world all around you, but there are no words. The wind in the trees goes 'whoosh'. The thunder goes 'boom'. The rain on the tight skin of a tent goes 'pitter-patter'. The wild geese say 'honk'. The half-wild dogs that live with your family make an abrupt and harsh sound like 'bow wow'. For fun, you begin imitating these sounds. You pretend to be the storm and say 'Whoosh ! Woo-oosh !' Then you see the lightning and you shout 'Boom ! Boom !' pretending to be thunder. After the thunder and lightning the rain comes and you whisper 'pitter-patter, pitter-patter' like the rain. When the rain stops you pretend to be the wild geese flying in the sky and you say 'Honk ! Honk !'. This is a loud, funny noise, so you say it again. Your brother hears the sound and he also joins you and makes the same sound. Both of you make such a noise that the dog starts barking and you both bark back. The game of

imitating natural sounds is fun and after some time you realize that you have invented some words. These are words that represent the sounds and similar sounds under all circumstances.

Hundreds of other such sounds may have been invented in this way, such as ‘squeak’, ‘clatter’, ‘bang’, and so on.

All this is guessing and people have been trying to guess for centuries how speech began. Plato, a Greek philosopher who lived about 400 years before Christ, thought that everything in the world had a natural name – and that it was man’s job to discover these natural names. It seemed that Plato thought that there was a perfect language given to man by God, the Creator of the Universe. The ancient Hebrews had almost the same idea. In the Bible, after God created the heaven and the earth, He said, ‘Let there be light’ and there was light. Next He arranged the earth just as He wanted. He made oceans and rivers, forests and gardens, fish and birds, and animals. At last he made Adam. He brought all the animals to Adam and Adam gave names to all the creatures and to every beast of the field.

The ancient Hebrews thought that the Language that God and Adam spoke was Hebrew, and for centuries many people believed this to be true. Sir Thomas Browne, an English poet and writer born in 1605 had a theory that any child brought up away from human beings, would naturally speak Hebrew. But this proved to be wrong. A child brought up in the midst of animals learnt only the animal sounds. Only after the child lived with people, did he learn to speak as people.

Therefore it seems clear that man invented speech, just as he invented so many other things like the wheel, the steam-engine, the jet plane etc. When and how he invented it we may never find out. Somewhere, long ago, someone said the first word, but we don’t know what the word was or who the someone was, or where he lived. So we can only say, as in a fairy tale, ‘Once upon a time man learned to talk’.

Activity–B

1. What are the problems that man can face without any language ? State at least five examples.
2. In what way can Language help in the progress of a society ? You may refer to the following fields :
(i) educational ii) industrial
(iii) social iv) occupational etc.

Discussion :

The ancient Hebrews thought that a child naturally would learn to speak Hebrew – the language of the Gods. Do you believe in this theory ? What do you believe could be the origin of language ? After all, it is just guess work.

1.4. Theories on the Origin of Language (Some Speculative Evidences)

We are profoundly ignorant about the origin of Language. Therefore, we have to satisfy ourselves with plausible speculations.

There are many theories on how language arose. For instance, the language of children, the language of primitive societies, the kinds of changes that have taken place in course of time and recorded history, the behaviour of higher animals like the chimpanzees, and the behaviour of people suffering from speech defects. These types of evidence might suggest a few pointers, but they all have their own limitations.

If we consider the language of children, we must remember that their situation was quite different to ours. Our children grow up in an environment where there is a fully developed language. For instance, we see that the earliest words used by children are mainly the names of things and people (Doll, Cup, Mummy, Daddy). But this does not prove that the earliest men also used the names of things and people. One thing we can perhaps learn is that the first articulate word pronounced by a child is most commonly something like 'da', 'ma', 'na', 'ba', 'ga', 'wa'. The vowel sound is often a short 'ah'. Nearly always, these early words consist of a constant sound followed by a vowel sound, (da-da-da etc.). Such words may also have been the first utterances of primitive man, though hardly with any meaning.

It is noticeable among primitive people how closely their languages are adapted to their material needs. In Eskimo, there is no single word for 'snow', but a whole series of words for 'new fallen snow', 'hard snow', and so on. In general primitive people seem to have words for the specific things that are important to them e.g. words for particular birds and plants that it eats and also words for birds and plants that it does not eat. This study can be done by experimenting with some ancient primitive words. Some writers have argued that the words of command like 'Give !' 'Strike !' are very archaic, since in the earliest known forms of many languages these imperative forms are almost identical with the simple stem of the verb, without any special ending added. For instance, the Latin word 'dic' (say !), 'dicit' (he says), 'dicunt' (they say) and 'dicere' (to say). The form used for giving a command is the shortest.

A study of the higher animals can help us by suggesting what man was like in the pre-linguistic stage, just before he became man. The noises, the signals and gestures made by higher apes show us what man started from in his creation of language but they can not show us how he created language. Man alone has broken through to the use of symbols but apes always remained on the other side of language. Apes, of course, have smaller brains than men have and it is because of this that men could break through to the use of Language.

Next we come to the study of the behaviour of people suffering from speech defects, which is perhaps the least helpful. The condition which has been referred to is 'aphasia' in which the power of speech is totally or partially lost, often due to some brain injury. While recovering from

'aphasia' the patient to some extent repeats the process gone through by a child in learning to speak for the first time. It is difficult, however, to see the grounds for this belief, because evidence such as this can not be convincing.

Emphasis on one type of evidence or another has led to different theories of the origin of language.

1.4.1. The Bow-Wow Theory

Primitive language was an imitation of natural sounds, such as the cries of animals. This is what is called the bow-wow theory. Supporters of this theory believe that a large number of words in any language are imitations of natural sounds—words like '*quack*', '*cuckoo*', '*peewit*'. They also add that many other words show a kind of 'sound symbolism'. Such words in English would be '*splash*', '*sludge*', '*slush*', '*grumble*', '*grunt*', '*bump*', and '*sneeze*'. Perhaps a primitive hunter wishing to tell his companion what kind of animal he had killed, may have imitated the call of that particular animal, and this may well have played a part in the development of vocal symbols.

This theory does not explain how language obtained its articulated structure. Imitation of natural sounds may explain part of the primitive vocabulary, and it may have played a part in the transition from expressive cry to vocal symbol, but it can not be a satisfactory explanation for the rise of language.

Some groups of sounds really are appropriate to certain meanings, and this can be seen by their occurrence in a number of words of similar meaning. For instance, in English we find initial fl—in a number of words connected with fire and light (e.g. flame, flare, flash) and in words connected with a flying or waving motion (e.g. flail, flap, flaunt, flay, flicker, flag, fluctuate, flurry, flutter). And once a group of words like this exists in the language, new words were coined in the same model which had nothing to do with flames or flickering.

1.4.2. The Pooh-Pooh Theory

The second theory of the origins of language is called the Pooh-pooh theory. According to this theory language arose from instinctive emotional cries, expressive of pain or joy. According to this view, the earliest linguistic utterances were interjections exclamations expressive of some emotional state. This theory does not explain the articulated nature of language, and it does not bridge the gap between the expressive cry and signal. We can imagine how, by association, an emotional cry may have become a signal : a cry of fear or pain, for instance, could easily become a signal which warned the group of danger ; but this level has already been reached by the higher animals which react to signals of this kind. The theory does not suggest any motivation of this development. The task of creating language would surely have been undertaken only under the pressure of man's needs.

1.4.3. The Ding-Dong Theory

The third theory begins from a fact we have already noticed, namely that there is an apparently mysterious harmony between sound and sense in a language. The theory argues that primitive man had a peculiar instinctive faculty, by which every external expression was given vocal expression. Every sensory impression was like the sound of a bell, producing a corresponding utterance. The problem about this theory is that it does not explain anything.

1.4.4. The Yo-He-Ho Theory

The fourth theory—the Yo-He-Ho theory was put forward by Noiré a nineteenth century scholar. This theory argues that language arises from the noises made by a group of men engaged in a joint effort to do something like moving a tree-trunk or lifting a rock. We all know that, while engaging in such joint efforts, people usually make involuntary vocal noises—like grunting or groaning noises in the process. Vocal noises of this kind might then have developed into words, meaning such things as ‘heave’, ‘rest!’, ‘lift!’. This theory has two great virtues : it gives a plausible explanation of the origin of language, and it envisages the origin of language in a situation involving human co-operation. It also envisages speech utterances like commands and other imperative forms. Arguments against this theory say that language would have been necessary before men could perform the kind of complex communal labour that the theory demands. However, we must surely expect language and co-operative human labour arising simultaneously, each making the other possible.

A variant of this theory has been recently put forward by A. S. Diamond. He agrees that the first articulatory words were commands, uttered simultaneously with the execution of violent arm movements. He envisages the rise of language in requests for assistance from one man to another in danger or in tool-making, or breaking off of tree branches and the killing of animals during hunting. Such things might have occurred at a more primitive stage of human society than the communal heaving suggested by Noiré.

1.4.5. The Gesture Theory

The fifth theory of the origins of language is of the view that gesture language preceded speech. Supporters of this theory point to the extensive use of gestures by animals of many different kinds, and the highly developed systems of gesture used by some primitive peoples. One of the popular examples is the sign language used by the Red Indians of North America, which was an elaborate system of gestures. It is true that speech and gesture are closely intertwined; the part of the brain that controls the hand movements are closely linked with those that control the vocal organs, and it seems that speech and gesture grew up together. This does not prove that gesture came first. While it is true that animals use gestures, it is also true that animals use cries. Perhaps this may have been true in case of early man.

Gesture Language, however highly developed, has great disadvantages compared with the spoken language. To use a gesture language you have to have your hands free ; but as soon as

man becomes a tool-maker and a craftsman his hands cease to be free; and when primitive man needed to communicate most urgently must have been precisely when he had a tool or a weapon in his hand, and it must have been during the time that led to the increased importance of vocal language. This would support the view that spoken language goes right back to the beginning of man's career as tool maker. Another disadvantage of the use of gesture is that it can not be used in the dark, or when the users are separated by obstructions like trees. Nor can a gesture be used to attract the attention of a man who is looking in another direction. None of these disadvantages of gesture can *prove* that early man had a spoken language, but they do suggest that he had very powerful motives for creating one.

Another variant of the theory is the *Mouth Gesture Theory* which was strongly argued by Sir Richard Paget and has recently been supported by an Icelandic professor, Alexander Johannesson. Paget argues that primitive man at first communicated by gestures and as his technique and intelligence developed he needed more exact gestures, but at the same time found that his eyes and hands were more occupied by his arts and crafts. When man was unable to go on gesturing because of their other uses, the mouth gestures were used, and when man realized that if air was blown through the mouth or nose the gesture became audible as whispered speech.

Language was thus produced by a sort of pantomime, the tongue and lips mimicking the movements of the hands in a gesture. Paget goes on to analyse large numbers of words in terms of mouth gestures, and this work in terms of mouth gestures, and this work continued by Johannesson, who made a list of some basic words of the earliest known language.

1.4.6. The Musical Theory

The sixth theory sees the origin of language in songs and sees speech and music as emerging from something earlier that included both. This theory was argued by the great Danish linguist Otto Jespersen. He argued that all the other theories could explain the origins of parts of language, but none of them could explain the whole of it. His own method was to trace the history of language backwards and study the trends that existed since the beginning of language. In this way, he arrived at the view that primitive language consisted of very long words, full of difficult jaw-breaking sounds and that it was more passionate and more musical than later languages. Earlier still, language was a kind of song without words which was not communicative, but merely expressive, the earliest language was not matter-of-fact or practical, but poetic and emotional, and love in particular was the most powerful emotion for outbursts of music and song. He says that "language, was born in the courting days of mankind".

1.4.7. The Contact Theory

The last of the theories—The Contact Theory, was forwarded by G. Révész, a former professor of psychology at Amsterdam. He argues that language arises through man's instinctive need for contact with his fellows, and he works out a series of stages by which language may have

developed. First comes the contact sound, which is not communicative, but merely expresses the individual's need for contact with his fellows ; for instance, the noises made by gregarious animals. Next comes the cry, which is communicative, but which is directed to the environment generally, not to an individual. Examples are mating calls and the cries of young nestlings in danger. Then there is the call for the satisfaction of some desire, which is found in domestic animals begging for something and speechless infants crying for their mother. The call is seen as the starting point for both music and language. Finally comes the word, which has symbolic function and is found only in man. According to Révész, the earliest speech was an 'imperative language', consisting only of commands, which later developed into mature human language. Révész's stages of language development seems to be more plausible. He does not, however, explain how language came to be articulated, and he places undue emphasis on the instinctive need for contact as a motive for the origin of language, while he neglects the urgent practical motives in co-operative labour which must have certainly impelled early man to use language.

With all the theories on the origin on language put forward by linguists and the more or less plausible speculations, they dealt with a period which has left us no record of its language. Once we reach periods in which writing was practised, we would be on much firmer ground.

Activity–C

The origin of language is an unsolved problem. A number of linguists have made plausible speculations trying to solve this problem, and as a result, several theories have been put forward by them. Complete the following table with necessary information :

Name of Theory	What it suggests	Arguments in favour and arguments against
Yo-He-Ho-Theory		
Gesture Theory		
Contact Theory		

Discussion :

According to your view, which theory do you think is more plausible ?

1.5. The Beginning of English

How did English Language come to be ? It is difficult to say, so most of what we say would be guesswork. We have to deduce our knowledge from all sorts of clues that we can find.

The explanation which follows of how the scholars found out about the beginnings of English will be simpler compared to the process they adopted, but it will give us some idea of it. The first thing what the scholars did was to compare all the Languages of Europe and Asia. Some languages such as Chinese were completely different from European languages. But some had similarities—for example, the modern languages of India which came from Sanskrit. Most of the Languages of Europe seemed to be quite a bit alike, too. By comparing the same words in many different languages, the scholars became quite sure of the likeness. The words *mother* and *night*, for instance, are similar in modern languages. You will see this in the following list.

English	→	night	mother
German	→	nacht	mútter
Spanish	→	noche	madre
Portuguese	→	noite	mae
Italian	→	notte	madre
French	→	nuit	mere
Russian	→	nochy	maty
Swedish	→	natt	moder
Danish	→	nat	moder

These two words are also seen to be similar in languages that are no longer spoken—the ancestors of modern languages.

For example :

Middle English	→	nyht	moder
Old English	→	niht	modor
Old Saxon	→	naht	modar
Old Irish	→	nocht	mathir
Latin	→	nox	mater
Greek	→	nyx	meter
Old Slavic	→	noshti	mati
Sanskrit	→	nakta	matar

The dead languages in the above list were spoken in places as far apart as India and Ireland, but the words for *mother* and *night* are similar in all of them. The scholars found that these and many, many other words were similar. In their study they worked back till the time when there was no writing in existence for the languages, back so far that no one knew anything about them. And then they started to deduce.

Let us take a simple example of this kind of comparable study used by the scholars. You have seen the dogs of different kinds of breed e.g. the bull dog, the poodles, the spaniel, the pomeranian, and so on. These dogs are white, black, brown, red, or of mixed colours. Some are short coated, others are long coated, curly-haired or straight-haired. They can weigh from one pound to more than two hundred pounds. Their ears can be short and pointed or long and floppy. They seem very different in many ways, but they also have some things in common. They are all four-legged, they are easily domesticated, they have sharp teeth, they have a keen sense of smell and hearing. But other animals also have the same characteristics, too. So how can we find out that dogs are dogs, all belonging to one family no matter how different they look, and they are descendants of the wolf? This has been possible because the scientists have studied the bones and teeth of dogs. Their bones and teeth are similar, and different from the bones and teeth of other animals that look much like them. Scientists have been able to prove this because they have studied the skeletons of domesticated dogs belonging to thousands of years back which were found along with skeletons of early man. Besides that, the animal who has bones and teeth like a dog is the wolf. Therefore, the scientists have come to a conclusion that all dogs are related, and their common ancestor is the wolf.

It is from the ‘bone structure’—the basic part of the word—of the various European and Asiatic languages that the scholars have deduced their common ancestor, a language called Indo-European language. If you refer back to the list of words for *night* and *mother* you will find the bone structure the scientists studied showing the differences. The Sanskrit *nakta* does not seem much like the Latin *nox*, but there is another form of the Latin word, ‘*nocte*’, which shows they are quite a bit similar.

There is no written word of Indo-European origin, and perhaps that was not probably written at all, but only spoken. However we can be fairly sure that it is the parent language of English, and that French, Spanish, German and Greek and many other languages are also descendants and thus are the cousins of English.

Through the study it has been possible to find out about what the Indo-European people were like. Scientists have deduced that they came from a temperate climate because they had words for *snow*, *winter*, for *spring*, for *bear*, and *wolf*, (but not for *camel*, or *elephant* or *tiger*). They had words for *oak tree* and *pine tree* but they did not have words for *palm tree*. Tracing the various languages back to the place from which they must have spread, we can deduce that the Indo-Europeans lived in east central Europe, perhaps in the region in which Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia meet. They lived in families with words for ‘mother’, ‘father’, ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ coming from Indo-European. Some of them (not all) lived in tribes, with chiefs. They had domesticated cattle, and dogs to help them. They drank cow’s milk and most probably used the skins for clothing. They learned to use simple hand tools made mostly from stone and wood, though they may have used some kind of metal too. They learned to cultivate the land using some of the hand tools as there are references of words for *corn* and *grain* in the Indo-European languages. But the Indo-Europeans were not farmers. They probably lived mostly tending flocks, and thus had to move frequently from place to place to provide food

for their animals. This ability to move and live at the same time became useful to them when they began to spread, as they did, through most of Europe and down into Asia. They could not read or write, or do much arithmetic, though they could count up to ten using their fingers and they knew that ten times ten is one hundred.

Thousands of years ago the Indo-Europeans began to spread far and wide, perhaps because they found metals new to them, especially copper and iron, which gave them better weapons and tools. One branch of the people moved south-east, and they must have named the rivers Danube and Don, and others in what is now south Russia, and by 1200 B.C they had come as far as India. Some Indo-Europeans went south of the Grecian, Italian and Spanish peninsulas. Some went to the west coast of Europe and all this took thousands of years. But eventually there was a tribe of Indo-Europeans called Celts who came to what is now the island of Britain. They crossed the channel between Europe and Britain in canoes made of log and skin. They came over with their families, with all their belongings, their cattle, and their language came along with them.

There were people in Britain before the Celts came, but no one knows what their language was. These people, who were the earlier inhabitants of the island were a far more primitive people than the Celts, because by the time Celts came, they were far advanced. They knew the use of iron for making tools instead of bronze or stone. They also knew how to make the *wheel*, one of the great inventions of man. The Celts probably could not settle on the island peacefully. There are still myths that tell how the Celts fought terrible magical enemies, the Firlbolgs, and these Firlbolgs may have been these earlier inhabitants of the British Isles. But eventually the Celts settled, perhaps driven to the North of the island. Other invaders of the Indo-European descendants came to the island and fought with them.

The new invaders were the Romans. They came from Italy in 55 BC. At that time Julius Ceasar who was the Great Roman General had conquered what is now called France and had decided to cross the channel and conquer Britain as well. The Romans needed metal and food to support their advanced civilization and they knew they would find that in Britain, as they had already been trading with the island for nearly a century. It took them a long time before they could finally become masters of Britain. They built roads and towns, remnants of which can still be found as you can drive on some of these Roman roads in Britain. The important people in Britain, and of course all the Roman settlers, spoke Latin which, like Celtic, was an Indo-European Language.

As far as we know, two languages had been spoken in Britain—Celtic and Latin—but the strange thing is that although both of these languages were Indo-European, neither is the base of English. Though there are some Celtic words in English now, only a very few date from the days when the Celts were the masters of England. Latin also went through the same fate. There are thousands of Latin words in the English Dictionary today, but the Romans who conquered England did not learn many of them. The Latin language left England along with the Romans, as most of Latin words used in England came long after the Romans were gone, through trade and exchange of culture with the continent of Europe.

Activity–D

1. How did the scientists find out that the origin of English Language could have been from Indo-European Language ? Who were the Indo-Europeans ?
2. Who were the Celts ? Where did they settle eventually ?
3. Who were the Romans ? When did they come to Britain ? What language did they speak ?

Discussion :

What language did the people speak in Britain when the Romans ruled England ?

1.6. The Anglo-Saxons

The Romans could not stay in Britain for long as they were facing a lot of trouble in Britain and there was also trouble going on in Rome—their homeland. Barbarians were harassing civilized people all over Europe. They fought with the Romans in Italy and also in Britain. The Romans saw that they could not handle so much trouble all around and so they decided to withdraw from the island. The British Celts were then left on their own without the strong Roman armies to protect them, and they needed protection. Scots and Picts, the other Celtic tribes came south from the north of the island and plundered and killed the Celts in Britain. New invaders came across the English channel and descended on the British Celts. These new invaders were the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes, and unlike the Romans these people stayed on. They took up farming when they were not at war, and they settled down and took over all the good farmlands in the country. The Celts lived on the hill tops or became the slaves of the new invaders. Some left the part of Britain that is now England and went to Wales or Ireland. Thus the Celtic language died in England and the language that the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes spoke, became the native language. This language was called Anglo-Saxon, or Old English.

The Old English language was spoken differently in different places. The Angles spoke one kind of English, the Saxons spoke another kind and the Jutes spoke another version, but all these versions were a form of Germanic. Germanic is not German as we now know it. Germanic was one of the original four western languages that came from Indo-European when the Indo-Europeans went roaming around to settle down in new places. Germanic was a cousin of Celtic, but by the time these people who spoke the Germanic language came to Britain it was quite a different tongue.

So you will find that the history of the English language is a history full of roaming and settling, invasions and wars. The next invasion came from the Danes, often called the Vikings, who had been raiding the coasts of England for a long time. After the Anglo-Saxons stayed in

England for a while, the Danes came again and this time they decided to stay. They fought with the people, they burnt and ruined the important towns and the monasteries which had been the centres of education. But finally a treaty was drawn up and they were given land (a part of England) to settle down, called the Danelaw. Here they lived and became Englishmen too. Slowly words from their language were added to the English language. And since they spoke a kind of Germanic, it was difficult for them to communicate with the Anglo-Saxons.

From these early centuries no original manuscript in English has been left to us, though there were some very beautiful ones that were written in Latin. A few early tomb stones of the Anglo-Saxons are still to be found. The earliest manuscript dates from about 1000 AD (Manuscript is from Latin 'Manu' means 'by hand', and 'scriptus' means 'written by hand', and all books at that time were written by hand in England before the middle of the fifteenth century).

Manuscripts in the English language were written in Britain before 1000 AD. We come to know about this because great libraries, like the British Museum in London and some in the United States, have copies of original manuscripts written long before the year 1000. If these were not written down, they would never have reached us. However most manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxons were lost. Perhaps they were destroyed when the Danes burned the Monasteries where they were kept. Others may have been lost because they were scratched on the bark or wood of the beech tree, which does not last very long.

In about 1000 AD, probably a monk made a copy of the manuscript called 'Far Traveller'. The lost original of that copy, which was composed in about 675 AD, is said to be the earliest example of written English. 'Far Traveller' is a poem of travel. The English in that poem would sound like a foreign language because English has changed so greatly since the seventh century. However, in a small group of islands in the North Sea, there are people who speak a language called 'Frisian' which is similar to the seventh century English and because of the isolation of the islands, the language there has not changed so much as the main body of English. We will not be able to read 'Far Traveller' unless we know Old English, but a modern Frisian could perhaps easily read the book. Similarly, a modern Frisian would not be perhaps able to read the books we read today unless he has studied modern English.

There is an example of another famous manuscript which, like 'Far Traveller', was copied around 1000 AD, and the original was later lost. The manuscript is 'Beowulf', a great English poem. No one knows who wrote it nor when it was written, but it is a blood- and-thunder story about a monster called Grendel who lived at the bottom of a lake in what is now Denmark. Grendel had been coming every night to the hall of King Hrothgar to murder and eat up the people of the court. Beowulf, who is the hero of the story, planned to kill Grendel and thus save the King and his courtiers. He waits for the monster Grendel to appear and soon it does :

- **Come on wanre niht scrinda sceadugenga.**
- **Came through the wan night slithering the shadow thing.**

The first line is Old English and the second line is a literal translation. But in modern English it would be :

The shadow-thing came slithering through the wan night.

The Old English language was mainly made up of words from Indo-European language. For several centuries, both before and after the Anglo-Saxons came to England, the language went through very little change. In the eleventh century, for the next three hundred years, Old English as an official language disappeared from England. It would have disappeared altogether like Latin and Celtic, but it did not. The Vikings or Danes had settled along the coast of Europe and spread over to England. Some of them settled in France where they stayed for a long time to be called Normans and to have adopted French as their language, an Indo-European tongue. In 1066 AD the Normans came to England with an army led by William, the Duke of Normandy, who wanted to be King of England. Harold the Saxon who was ruling England in those unsettled times, was busy fighting in the north of England. But very soon he came to the south to fight off William and his army. The two armies fought at Hastings, and William won the battle. So now the Normans who spoke the Indo-European tongue, came to settle in England.

The Normans now took over all the important positions and properties in England. The Anglo-Saxons were still living in England, but the Normans were the government officials, the lawyers, the wealthy, traders, the big land-owners. On the other hand the Anglo-Saxons were the small farmers and merchants, the servants and so on. The Normans had no desire to learn old English. They considered the language to be crude. So all business had to be done in French, all writing was in French, the courts were administered in French. Latin was the language of the Church in England and everywhere else. Latin was the language of the schools. Schools were not meant for all as it is now, it was only for the upper classes. For three hundred years the official languages of England were French and Latin and Old English was used only for talking.

The court, when it opened said in French, 'Oyez ! Oyez ! 'Oyez' which means 'Hear' 'Hear' Hear' ; but mothers did not say 'Ouez !' to their children when they wanted them to listen. Perhaps they said 'Hwaet'. But whatever they said, it was Old English for the word 'listen', not the French ('Oyez !'. The Normans called meat 'beef' (Old French 'boef'), veal (Old French 'veel'), mutton (Old French 'moton'), venison (Old French 'veneson'), but the Anglo-Saxons who tended or hunted animals used the word cow (Old English 'cu'), calf (Old English 'cealf'), sheep (Old English 'sceap'), and deer (Old English 'deor).

The common people of England continued to speak in Old English for three centuries. Their language lived inspite of the fact that it was hardly written or ever spoken by the upper classes. In the seventeenth century, when the French speaking Huguenots went to America, they were powerful enough to abolish English, and from then till now French had been the official language of the United States. However, whatever the official language had been, if the people of America continued to speak in English, the language would have lived because a language continues to live when it is spoken and dies when it is not spoken.

Activity–E

1. Why were the Romans forced to leave Britain ?
2. Who were the new invaders who came to settle in Britain ?
3. How did Old English become the native language of the people ?
4. Who were the Normans ? Why couldn't they communicate with the Anglo-Saxons ?
5. Why was it so difficult to read and understand some early examples of written English ?

Discussion :

A language dies when it is not spoken. – Discuss.

1.7. Chaucer, Shakespeare and Modern English

Norman invasion was the last invasion of the British Isles. When the Normans were in England, they intermingled with the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes, and eventually they all became Englishmen and eventually English came back as a written language. Important writers such as Geoffrey Chaucer wrote in English, and it became a tradition to use the native tongue, which by Chaucer's time had become very much like modern English. The Canterbury Tales, which is a humorous and beautiful poem by Chaucer would be difficult to read without some amount of help, but it is closer to modern English than it is to Old English.

The poem begins with a celebration of the coming of spring in England after the long, dark winter. Following are the first two lines :

Whanne that April with his shoures swote
The droughte of March hath perced to the rote.

At first these lines might puzzle you, particularly the word 'swote'. But if you know that the word means 'sweet', then you can perhaps figure out what the lines could be in modern English, e.g.

When April with his sweet showers
Has pierced the drought of March to the root.

The poem is about a group of people riding on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas á Backet in Canterbury Cathedral. Some of the people who are in the group are a priest, a woman from just outside the town of Bath, a miller, two nuns, a knight, a sea captain, a doctor, and a

lawyer. On their way these pilgrims, they tell stories to each other for entertainment, and it is these stories that make up the Canterbury Tales.

One of the story tellers is a nun. She was extremely polite. Here is Chaucer's description of how dainty she was when she ate :

Wel coude she carie a morsel and wel kepe
That no drope ne fille up—on hir brest.
In curteisye was set ful muche hir lest.
Hir over lippe wyped she so clene,
That in hir coppe was no ferthing sene
Of grece, when she drouken hadde hir draughte.

In modern English, these lines would read as :

“Well could she carry a morsel and well keep
So that no drop fell upon her breast.
On courtesy was set full much her wish.
Her upper lip she wiped so clean,
That in her cup was no speck seen
Of grease, when she had drunk her draught.

This nun not only had good manners, but she was very kind hearted.

She was so charitable and so pitous
She wolde wepe, if that she sawe a mous,
Caught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.

In modern English the lines will read as :

She was so charitable and so full of pity.
She would weep if she saw a mouse
Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bleeding.

The above examples show that Middle English as Chaucer's English was called, is not so difficult to understand when it is written in Modern English spelling.

After the Norman conquest there were no other invasions in England by foreign peoples, but there was another kind of invasion— an invasion of European culture. The English people continued trading with the continent of Europe, so, along with European goods they imported European ideas of art and writing and architecture, and also a number of European words. It is strange that inspite of the hundreds of years the Latin speaking Romans were in England, and the

hundreds of years that French was used as a language by the Norman conquerors, English had very few foreign words. But when England was peacefully trading with Europe, a lot of French and Latin words began to come into the language. The English language in this way developed and became a rich language. By around 1600 it was the language of Shakespeare, and now you can read his plays without any help, though you can understand better if you know the meanings of some of the words which have changed since then.

The following is a stanza from one of Shakespeare's songs in 'Love's Labour's Lost'.

When icicles hang by the wall,
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
And Tom bears logs into the hall,
And milk comes frozen home in pail,
When blood is nipped and ways be foul,
Then nightly sings the staring owl ;
Tu-who ;
Tu-whit, tu-who—a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

Some words in the above song might seem strange. When Dick 'blows his nail' he blows on his hands to warm them, and when Joan 'doth kill the pot', she skims the grease off whatever is in the pot, probably soup. Otherwise Shakespeare's poem is easy to read and it gives a vivid picture of an English winter.

A living language keeps changing from time to time. New words are added in the language—some of the new words are penicillin, television, brain-wash, etc. Words also disappear from the language. Some of the words that have disappeared from English from the time of Shakespeare are : vare (eager or ready), compt (neat), and weal (wealth). Again, some words have taken new meanings eg. in English 'quick' used to mean 'alive' ; 'gripe' used to mean 'grip', or 'hold' ; and 'nice' used to mean 'foolish'. But otherwise the language has not changed greatly since the time of Shakespeare.

It took three hundred years for Old English to become Middle English, and another three hundred years for Middle English to change to Modern English. In the first three hundred years, English went through a vast change. It would not be possible for Chaucer to read and understand *Beowulf*. In the second three-hundred-year-phase, English again went through so much change that, Shakespeare could not have read and understood Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales' without finding it strange. In the three hundred-year period since the beginning of Modern English, which brings up to the present period, English has gone through very little change.

The following lines from the Bible will show the different stages of the change :

Old English—(10th century) : Da wearð micel styrung geworden on pære, swapæt. pæt scip wearð ofergoten mid ypum ; witodlice he slep.

Middle English—(14th century) : And loo ! a grete steryng was maad in the see, so that the litil ship was hilid with wawis ; but he slepte.

Modern English—(17th century) : And behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves : but he was asleep.

This was just a brief history of the English language. To sum up : The Celts came to England, but their language disappeared. Then came the Romans and their language also disappeared. The Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes came to England, and their language became the base of modern English. The French-speaking Normans came with the Anglo-Saxon language. Old English became submerged, but after three hundred years it became once again alive and French declined. The English people traded with Europe and brought back with them European culture and French and Latin languages adding thousands of new words into the English language.

In the mean time, many Greek words were included into English. Some came directly as scientists coined many new words from Greek. For example, the recent study comparing human brains with mechanical brains is called *cybernetics*, from the Greek work 'Kybernetes', which means 'helmsman', and the suffix *-ics* means 'the study of'. Some words of Greek origin have come indirectly. An example of this is 'helicopter', from French 'hélicoptère', from the Greek 'helix'. English has also borrowed a few words from other languages as well. For instance, 'kimono' from the Japanese ; 'tomato' is from 'Nahuati, a language spoken by the Indians in Mexico; the word 'camel' is from 'Hebrew, 'algebra' is an Arabic word, 'typhoon' is a Chinese word, 'yam' is Senegalese—an African language; 'Zebra' is from Amharic—another African language; 'mohogony' is from a West Indian language, and 'ketchup' is Malayan.

It is surprising and really amazing that English language which has borrowed so widely, has borrowed from other Indo-European languages and it is this borrowing that has made English so flexible and so colourful and has helped in making it one of the great languages of the world.

Activity–F

1. How did English come back as a written language ?
2. What is Chaucer's English called ?
3. How did English language become a rich language in the 17th century and later one of the great languages of the world ?

Discussion :

'A living language keeps changing from time to time.' – Discuss.