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The Foundations of English and the Formation of the Base Register

1. Introduction

- Central mass of the core of the lexis is Anglo- Saxon. Other elements derive from Norse, Roman and Celtic origin
- All these languages have a common ancestral origin
- The landscape is a wordfield which reflects the various invasions:
    - The land, basic words for routes and most of the terms describing the landscape are Anglo- Saxon i.e. *sea, water, hill, way, road*
    - There is paucity of terms deriving from the Celts, but some elements can be found in river names
    - Terms of constructions and military artefacts are Roman contributions i.e. *street* from Latin *strata*; *wall* from Latin *vallum*
    - In parts of Yorkshire 75 per cent of place- names are of Norse origin as well as some base words i.e. *sky, dale, rugged*

2. Ancestral origins

- Probably lie in Mesopotamia, the Steppes of the Ukraine and the Danube valley
- The languages and its speakers are called Indo- European and the most closely language to the source is Sanskrit
- When the Indo- Europeans started to migrate they split into a western and eastern stream. The western branch divided into the Latin, the Germanic and the Celtic language families. The eastern branch generated the Slavonic, the Baltic, the Indian and the Iranian languages
- Therefore, all these languages grew from one single source and interacted over a thousand years
- To prove the relationship of the languages, the syntactic structure can be analysed or basewords in the cognate languages can be compared i.e. the word *mother* in modern, middle and old English, German, Swedish, French, Latin, Greek and Sanskrit
- Anglo- Saxon roots often extend themselves by metaphor or compounding i.e. *father-figure; fatherland*
- Latin and Greek forms show a flexibility in formation and precision in meaning

3. Sound- Shifts

- Fundamental differences in base words such as *fish* and *pisces* evolve from a sound-shift
- The recognition of this sound- shift was called Grimm´s law and later the First Consonant Shift
- Indo- European *p* became Germanic *f*. Other sound- shifts affected sounds which are represented by the letters *b, v, p and f* as well as *g, k* and *h*
- This shows a relationship of the words *heart* and *cardiac; knee* and *genou; bishop* and *episcopus*

4. Lexical Evidence for the Origins of Indo- European

- To find out more about the lifestyle and environment of the original speakers, the base vocabulary has been analysed for emphases and omissions
- I.e. in the 19th century there were several terms defining carriages like *chariot, post-chaise* and *landau*. In times of the horseless carriage we now have other terms like *limousine, convertible, station wagon* and *sports car*
- The Indo- European vocabulary proposes a nomadic people which knew how to weave wool or work leather. The vocabulary describing the climatic environment includes terms for *snow, bears* and *wolves,* which would propose a cool temperature

5. The Celts

- The earliest of the Indo-European migrations to the British Isles within the range of recorded history
- The Celtic languages are of such antiquity as not to be immediately identifiable as belonging to the Indo-European group
- In some words Celtic has Romance echoes i.e. *pont* (bridge), *mel* (honey), *tarrow* (ox). In other areas Germanic roots are still visible i.e. *march* (horse) cognate with *mare*. But in many instances the Celtic term is quite any geographical is quite unlike any geographical neighbour or historical ancestor in the family i.e. *du* (black), *glas/ gwer* (green)
- The Celtic languages can be divided into two groups:
  Brythonic (”P”-Celtic):   Breton, Cornish, Welsh   *pen* (head)
  Goidelic (”Q”-Celtic):   Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Manx   *ceann* (head)
- The term ”Celt” derives from *Keltoi*, the name given by the Greek historian Herodotus. The Roman writers referred to them as *Galli* or *Gauls*, while those who settled in Britain were called *Brittani*. The Anglo-Saxons used the term *wealh* to describe the inhabitants. Te earlier sense was *foreigner* later, as the Celts lost status, it started to acquire the sense of *slave* or *servant*. Finally it meant *shameless person*
- Celtic vestiges are still apparent in place-names:
  Lincoln   Lindum Colonia   *llyn* (lake)
  Dover   Dubris   *dwfr* (water)
- Celtic terms which have survived are generally those of rivers i.e. *Avon, Exe, Wye* or geographical features i.e. *crag, tor, combe/ cwm*
- Some Celtic terms have survived in the English language i.e. *bragget* (mead), *brock* (badger), *coracle* (wicker boat)

6. The Coming of the English

- The Roman occupation of Britain extended from 55 BC to AD 410
- Towards the end of the Roman era England was subject to raids by the Picts and the Scots from the north and by Saxons from the east
- Into the power-vacuum left by the retreating Roman legions came the Anglo-Saxons, first as mercenaries, then as belligerent settlers
- Bede, a monk, describes the invasions three centuries after the event in *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. His book explains the distribution of dialects caused by the dispersal of the various peoples and it is supportes by the English county names:
  Essex   ➔ East Saxons
  Sussex   ➔ South Saxons
  Wessex   ➔ West Saxons
  East Anglia ➔ Angles

- There are various areas of dispute such as the presence of the Jutes and the role of the Frisians
- Bede stresses that the invaders were not one people but consisted of three main groups. This explains the linguistic diversity which is apparent from the earliest Anglo-Saxon manuscripts
- Anglo-Saxon comprehensively displaced Celtic and still forms the core of the language. Ancient names of places changed from Celtic roots which were then Romanized and Saxonized
  Celtic: Londinos ➜ Roman: Londinium ➜ Anglo-Saxon: Londene ➜ Modern: London
- The element-ing ties a place name to the Saxon founder (patronymic fashion) :
  Buckingham ➜ "The home of the sons of Bucca"
  Nottingham ➜ "The home of the sons of Snot"

7. The Early Names of the English
- The invaders were originally called Saxons but later Latin writers began to term them Angles. Prior to the Norman Conquest the name *Angelcynn* was commonly applied to both the people and the land. *Englalond* emerged around the period of the Danish invasions
- Anglo-Saxon was used from the eighth century in Latin and Old English to distinguish the Saxons of England from those in old Saxony. From the earliest times the term applied to the variety of dialects was *Englisc*. Thus *English* turns out to be older as a name for the language than for the people. The dominance of the term Englisc probably reflects the early influences of the Anglian kingdoms
- By the end of the Anglo–Saxon period West Saxon had assumed the standard for the written form of the language

8. Christianizing the Heathen
- In 597 St Augustine of Canterbury arrived with a group of forty Christian monks entrusted by Pope Gregory with the mission of converting the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity
- The verbal record of this ancient Christian influence is embedded in Latin and Greek words which, like the continental borrowings, no longer have their classical characteristics. The original inflections were worn away to the extent that the words looked and sounded like natives
  Greek: *Kyriakon* ➜ Anglo-Saxon: *cirice* ➜ Modern: *church*

9. Pagan Fossils
- Pagan fossils are words taken over from the heathen. The name *Easter*, for example, derives from the Dawn Goddes known in Northumbria as *eastron*, a fertility goddess whose rites were celebrated in an ancient pagan spring festival. *God* is in origin a pagan word with roots in the rite of sacrifice
- The most obvious pagan fossils are the names of the days of the week, all of which derive from Classical and Scandinavian deities, or supposed planetary influence
- There was an initial resistance to some of the new Christian terms
  Boda (messenger) was preferred to the Greek *angelos* and *bodian* (to give message) was used instead of Latin *praedicare*. Though *biscop* was adopted, the senior office was termed *heahbiscop*, not *arcebiscop*. Such hybrids became numerous