AN ELEMENTARY HISTORY OF ENGLISH

[Fascicle one]

By Marino Castrillón

INTRODUCTION

With the present issue Ikala initiates the publication of the essay "An Elementary History of English", by Marino Castrillón, a former full-time instructor and chairman of the Department of Modern Languages (one of the four names that the School of Languages has had so far). Sections dealing with the most outstanding topics in the development of the language will appear serially, until the treatise is presented in its entirety.

These materials which include -wherever appropriate- the necessary references to the Spanish tongue, served as the basic text for a course in the subject, for a span of over thirty years. They offer (it is our pious hope) suitable information for teachers, translators, students, and any one interested in the growth, position, and future of English. An overall grasp of the history of any tongue should be a must for any cultivated person, not only for students of languages, as can be inferred from the following quotation by Albert C. Baugh:

"But it is reasonable to assume that the liberally educated man should know something of the structure of his language, its position in the world and its relation to other tongues, the wealth of its vocabulary together with the sources from which that vocabulary has been and is being enriched, and in general the great political, social, and cultural influences which have combined to make his language what it is."

FOREWORD

The purpose of this essay is primarily to heal a gap existing in the curriculum of English studies at the Department of Languages of the University of Antioquia, concerning the availability of suitable textbooks for the current programs. No treatise, I believe, has ever been published that could possibly render the history of the English language palatable for the taste and linguistic resources of a Colombian or - for that matter — a Latin American undergraduate student. Most textbooks have been devised for the native speaker of English, with little or no relationship to the Spanish tongue. The large accumulation of details, no matter how brilliant and learned they could be, becomes unnecessary in the case of Colombian undergraduates and contribute to make the existent treatises unduly cumbersome and rather inadequate for introductory courses. Besides, idiosyncratic differences between Anglo-American and Latin-American cultures bear heavily upon the general spirit of the works themselves.

The father of this humble opusculum hereby relinquishes all claim to originality, if such an animal exists. He will be happy and content to equip his fellow-countrymen with a useful if unsophisticated tool for the preliminary steps into the history of the English language.

PREFATORY NOTE

The history of the English language is a subject as fascinating as the history of the British people. The bloodstream of contemporary Englishmen contains as many foreign elements as variegated and exotic influences show up in their speech. Tea is a Chinese contribution; caravan comes from Persian; vodka from Russian; robot from Czech; coffee from Turkish; tobacco from a Caribbean dialect. Greek is present with church; Latin with street; Spanish with cargo; Italian with imbroglio; French with rouge. The African dialects contributed kraal; the American ones canoe; Malayan gong; Arabic harem. Sauerkraut represents German; harakiri Japanese; sargasso Portuguese; schlemiel Hebrew; bungalow Hindi. These are just illustrations chosen at random, not to mention the various coinages that the progress of science has caused to be introduced into the language, such as radar, kodak, shrapnel, and so on.

This diversity of word sources makes English perhaps the most cosmopolitan tongue in the world nowadays, a factor that might very well contribute to its becoming a universal language, in spite of Kemp Malone's comment in the sense that such a freedom in borrowing is nothing but a "chronic case of linguistic indigestion." Be it as it may, the truth is that Englishmen or Americans do not make any bones about naturalizing alien terms as freely as possible.

A span of one thousand years separates King Alfred's Heo bið wlitig from our She is beautiful. Yet, there is a link between the two utterances, since she is the product of the amalgamation of the old personal pronoun heo with the feminine article or demonstrative seo; the break is not so complete as it seems at first glance. Old English, no matter how unfamiliar it may appear to us, constitutes nonetheless the genesis and backbone of its modern counterpart. Father and son do not by any means wear identical outer garments, yet at the root they are closely and organically intertwined, especially in matters concerning the general outlines of sentence patterns and syntax.

INDO EUROPEAN

Generalities

Before taking a look at Old English it is convenient to say a word about the common ancestry of a few Asiatic and most European languages. The similarity of words, appearing in different though related tongues, to express the same idea or concept, caused scholars to presume the existence of a common source and to search for it. To wit, let's consider the word father in several languages: Greek has pater, Latin pater, Sanskrit pitar, Gothic fadar, Old Norse fa ir, German Vater, Dutch Vader, Old Irish athir, French père, Spanish padre. A similar case occurs with brother, for which Latin has frater, Greek frater, Sanskrit bhratar, Old Slavic bratu, Irish brathair, Dutch broeder, German Bruder, Italian fratello, French frère, Spanish fray or fraile (though these two terms refer specifically to members of religious communities). The close relationship among these words is easily detectable; it led linguists to conjecture that there should have existed a common stem from which a large family of languages developed.

Sanskrit

A trascendental step that considerably accelerated the process toward the classification of this vast family of languages termed Indo-European was taken with the discovery of Sanskrit. Sanskrit

which means "perfectly done" became a sort of linguistic nexus corresponding to "the missing link" of evolutionary theories. Indeed, a gap was bridged with the discovery of this interesting language, a fact accomplished by the beginning of the nineteenth century. As professor Albert C. Baugh remarks it is easier to detect the kinship between the English word brother and the Sanskrit bhratar than between brother and Latin frater. The enthusiasm aroused by the finding of Sanskrit reached a point at which scholars considered it the father of Indo-European languages. This proved to be erroneous. Sanskrit is not the parent; it is though, an important member of the brotherhood of Eurasian tongues termed Indo-European.

The Original Locale

Presumably, by the year 3,500 B.C. there lived a group of people called Aryan from whose speech the several languages of the Indo-European family were derived. The exact localisation of the area in which this primitive community dwelled has never been satisfactorily identified; it thus remains a matter of conjecture. Professor Potter advances the theory that the plains of what is now Ukraine and Southern Russia could be the original seat from which the Aryans eventually disbanded and emigrated to sundry other localities. Professor Baugh holds the opinion that, on the evidence of vocabulary, a European home for the primitive community is perhaps more probable. H. H. Bender suggests Lithuania, on the grounds that a common term for honey and mead in several tongues of the family indicates that the starting point was a region full of honey-bees; Latin has mel, honey; Greek melita or melissa, bee; Old English meodu, from which modern mead, a beverage made of honey and water.

Professor Logan Pearsall Smith believes that the primeval Indo-European or Aryan community dwelled at first in lowlands suitable for pasturage, from which they in time moved to wooded areas. By the year 500 B.C. a tribe separated itself from the common

family and migrated toward the German forests where they started to develop their particular tongue, according to certain patterns or laws thus giving birth to the so-called Proto-Germanic language.

The Term "Indo-European"

Several labels have been tried to designate Indo-European. At first Aryan was popular among linguists, though the term brings to mind an awkward identification of race and language; Indo-Teutonic or Indo-Germanic found favor among German scholars; perhaps the most accurate tag would be Indo-European, which enjoys general acceptance today.

The Family

Indo-European has been divided into nine branches, to which two of recent discovery, namely Hittite and Tocharian, were added. Here is a list of all family members, with a brief reference to each.

1. *Balto-Slavonic:* Includes Prussian (later replaced by German), Lettic, Lithuanian, Old Slavonic, Old Bulgarian, Great Russian (which we commonly refer to simply as "Russian"), White Russian, Little Russian or Ukranian, Polish, Czechoslovakian, Sorbian or Wend, Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, and Slovenian.

2. *Celtic:* Includes Scottish, Gaelic (or Erse), Manx, and Welsh.

3. *Italic:* Embraces Latin and its descendants, the so-called Romance languages, such as Spanish, French, Italian and Portuguese.

4. *Albanian:* A language once spoken on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea.

5. *Hellenic:* The ancestor of modern Greek (also called Romanic). It comprised five dialectal groups: Ionic, Aeolic, Doric, Arcadian-Cyprian, and Attic.

6. *Armenian:* Spoken in the neighborhood of the Black Sea.

7. *Indian:* Includes several varieties of Sanskrit, among which Classical Sanskrit, the language of the two great national Indian epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana.*

8. *Iranian:* Includes Old Persian and Avestan. The latter was used by Zoroaster for his *Zend-Avesta,* the sacred book of the Parsees.

9. *Hittite:* Discovered by the beginning of our century and added to the Indo-European family due to its structure, if not because of its vocabulary.

10. *Tocharian:* Also discovered in the present century. It was spoken in Central Asia.

11. *Germanic:* The most important for our purposes, since it is the branch from which English descends. It has been conventionally divided into three groups: East Germanic (includes Gothic, known only because of Bishop Ulfilas' use of it in translating portions of the Bible); North Germanic, which comprises Old Norse, Icelandic, Danish, and Swedish; West Germanic, which includes Old High German (ancestor of Modern Literary German), and Low German, which in turn comprises Old Frisian, Old Saxon, Old Dutch, and Old English.

The First Consonant Shift

As stated before, the supposed ancestors of the Teutonic or Germanic races segregated themselves from the primitive Indo-European community. This group, it is assumed, started to pronounce certain sounds in their peculiar way, perhaps unconsciously. Before going ahead it is useful to mention here that when dealing with the process by which a parent language splits up into several derivatives, three main factors should be considered: natural change, geographical boundaries, and contact with other languages. These three conditions account for the division of Indo-

European into several branches, and for the breaking up of each branch into other linguistic groups or subgroups. The sound changes that caused the formation of Germanic from Indo-European follow regular patterns, as discovered and formulated by the German scholar Jakob Grimm, in collaboration with the Danish philologist Rasmus Christian Rask. These patterns, otherwise known as Grimm's law, are essentially the following:

a. The Indo-European voiceless stops /p/ /t/ /k/, preserved as such in Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit, changed into spirants /f/ /θ/ /h/ in Germanic languages. For the sake of illustration here are a few examples, Latin being our representative for the preserving languages:

Latin	English
pes	foot
piscis	fish
nepos	nephew
tres	three
tu	thou
tenuis	thin
carus	whore
centum	hundred
cornu	horn

b. Voiced stops /b/, /d/, and / δ / in Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit, turn into voiceless stops (/p/, /t/, /k/) in Germanic:

Latin	English
cannabis	hemp
dicere	teach
domare	tame
duo	two
genus	kin

ager	acre
granum	corn

c. The spirants /bh/, /dh/, /gh/ become voiced stops (/b/, /d/, /g/)

Sanskrit	bharami	English	bear
Sanskrit	dha	English	do
Latin	hostis (from ghostis)	English	guest

Germanic and Italic

Grimm's Law, in many cases, accounts for the difference between English words and the corresponding Spanish cognates. Spanish, as representative of the Italic branch of Indo-European, kept rather than changed the original sound of Latin for cases falling under the jurisdiction of Grimm's Law. Latin, it is supposed, more or less faithfully preserved the original phonetic system of Indo-European in the same way as (according to Otto Jespersen) Greek did - perhaps with more accuracy. By virtue of Grimm's Law English has foot and fish, whereas Spanish has pie and pez, the latter keeping the original /p/ sound of Indo-European. For the sake of clarity let's list again some of the words previously used to illustrate Grimm's Law, adding the respective Spanish cognates. To avoid unnecesary complications, words like genus (Spanish género), affected by posterior changes which however do not destroy the essence of our assertions, have been excluded:

Latin	Spanish	English
nepos	nepote	nephew
tres	tres	three
tu	tu	thou
tenuis	tenue	thin

carus	caro	whore
cornu	cuerno	horn
dicere	decir	teach
domare	domar	tame
duo	dos	two
ager	agro	acre
granum	grano	corn

Finally, the above remarks should enable the student to establish an interesting difference between such pairs as <u>mother</u> and <u>maternal</u>. The former is native in English, though akin to others like Latin <u>mater</u> and Greek <u>meter</u>; the latter is borrowed from the same Latin term (<u>mater</u>) as indicated, mainly, by the preservation of the /t/ sound. Also, by bearing these observations in mind, the Spanish-speaking student of the English language will find certain differences between his mother tongue and English less arbitrary and more understandable.

(to be continued)

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