



## Language as a Linguistic Discipline or Communicative Function

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### ABSTRACT

This article is about the theory previously studied in the course called Linguistics. In a way ties will be established between general principles of linguistics and concrete linguistic facts, in other words, theoretical knowledge will find its application in practice. The field of linguistics may be divided in terms of three dichotomies: synchronic versus diachronic, theoretical versus applied and micro linguistics. According to the micro linguistics view, languages should be analyzed for their own sake and without reference to their social function, to the manner in which they are acquired by children, to the psychological mechanism that underlie the production and reception of speech, to the literary and the aesthetic or communicative function of language.

### Keywords:

Linguistics, discipline, social function, psychological, mechanism, to realize, fulfillment, satisfaction and achievement.

### Introduction

Literature that inspires and educates aims to make society a better place to live in. The audience of a good work of literature should feel uplifted in thought after completing the book. All epics in different languages do this. They convey a message to society through their art.

Though literature is all this, the result of having read a piece of literary work is a sense of fulfillment, satisfaction and achievement. We recognize we are not alone in what we feel and think, for literature is the depiction of universal thoughts. We realize that men and women have the same emotions and react almost similarly cutting through time, space and matter. Literature intrigues our minds with its allusions, similes and metaphors. When we decipher them, we partake of the creative process. This gives us a sense of accomplishment. [1, 3]

In rare cases, books have had the power to shake the very foundations of society. They lead to paradigm shift of thought and way of living. They inspire whole nations to rebel and

change. This is the power of literature. It shapes, it moods and in the process entertains. The poem is great relaxation. If literature is spiritual rest, honorable literature then is like a treatment of soul that often gets tired and exhausted of everyday worries, problems, and even sorrow. Food for the heart and other better senses of the human species can be given only by literature and other fine arts. They nourish souls and enrich lives. A society or a people who give up on literature do themselves a terrible harm.

### Materials And Methods

Every language has a history; and as in the rest of human culture, changes are constantly taking place in the course of the transmission of a language from one generation to another. Languages change in all their aspects, in their pronunciation, word forms, syntax, and word meanings. These changes, mostly gradual in their operation, become noticeable only cumulatively over the course of several generations. [1,3] In studying a foreign language, English in our case, the student inevitably compares it to his native tongue and

is often astonished to find great differences not only in the structure of the target language but also in the way ideas are expressed in it.

There is no denying that English spelling is somewhat difficult for a Belarusian learner of English. This is because the written form of the English word is conventional rather than phonetic. Therefore, some phonetic phenomena cannot be explained from the modern point of view without going into the history of the language. When the Latin alphabet was first used in Britain, writing was phonetic. After the introduction of printing in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the written form of the word became fixed, whereas the sounds continued to change. This resulted in a growing discrepancy between letter and sound. Hence, such "difficult" words as *light*, *daughter*, *speak*, *great*, *book* and many others where their pronunciation and spelling differ. Moreover, if you ask a little English boy or girl to write the word *light* ( in the meaning of *daylight* ) he or she would rather spell it as *lite* because they have not learned its spelling yet .On the other hand, modern spellings show how such words were pronounced in the past. For example, the word *light* sounded as [lix't], which is easy to prove if you compare it with the Belarusian word *lixmap* (something that produces light). [5]

As far as English vocabulary is concerned, it contains words, which are similar to words found in other languages. For example, English – German (*mother* – *Mutter*, *father* – *Vater*, *winter* – *Winter*, *hand* – *Hand*, etc.); English - French (*revolution* – *revolution*, *autumn* – *automne*, *river* – *rivière*, etc.); English –Russian (*float* – *плот*; *флот*); English –Belarusian (*glebe* – *глеба*, *must* – *мысць*, etc.). Without going into the history of English, it is difficult to say whether these words are native or borrowings from the above mentioned languages. [5]

English grammar also presents some phenomena, which a Belarusian learner of English will find misleading. For example, the irregular plural of nouns (*man*- *men*, *foot* –*feet*, *mouse* – *mice*, etc), or the same form for both singular and plural of such words as *sheep*, *deer*, *fish*, or the fact that English modal verbs,

unlike the other verbs, take no ending –s in the 3d person singular, and many other similar facts. All these things are traced back to a distant past and can be accounted for only by studying the history of the language.

Another important aim of this course is of a more theoretical nature. Study of the history of any language is based on applying general principles of linguistics to the language in question. While tracing its evolution through time, students will be confronted with a number of theoretical questions connected with the language development in general and its aspects in particular. To find answers to these questions, students will have to rely on the theory previously studied in the course called *Introduction to Linguistics*. In this way ties will be established between general principles of linguistics and concrete linguistic facts, in other words, theoretical knowledge will find its application in practice.

While studying the history of the English language we will inevitably have to deal with the history of the English nation considering the 'traces' it left in the language development. It goes without saying that a systematic study of the language's development from the earliest times to the present day will enable the student to acquire a more profound understanding of modern English, its role in our world and perspectives of its future development.

The field of linguistics may be divided in terms of three dichotomies: synchronic versus diachronic, theoretical versus applied, and micro linguistics versus macro linguistics. A synchronic description of a language describes the language as it is at a given time; a diachronic description is concerned with the historical development of the language and the structural changes that have taken place in it. The goal of *theoretical linguistics* is the construction of a general theory of the structure of language or of a general theoretical framework for the description of languages; the aim of applied linguistics is the application of the findings and techniques of the scientific study of language to practical tasks, especially to the elaboration of improved methods of language teaching.

Every living language changes through time, but no records of linguistic changes have ever been kept, as most changes pass unnoticed by the contemporaries.

Therefore, the main source for the history of any language is written documents that have come down to us. In addition, based on these documents a language history is reconstructed. As for documents themselves, they give a clear picture of the vocabulary and grammar of a certain period. As for phonetic structure, such documents do not always give clear enough information, for, as we have already discussed, sound may change but spelling remains or, as often as not, one letter may denote different sounds, etc. So in this sense written documents may be misleading.

Nevertheless, study of pronunciation of a particular period may be helped by illiterate spellings, which are found in private letters and diaries, as they are mostly phonetic. (Remember the example with *lite* = light). Therefore, they can give a clue to the pronunciation of this or that word.

Some hints are proved by rhymes. For example, careful study of words, which in spite of similar spelling, do not rhyme together, may help to establish phonetic differences hidden by the spelling. For example, a rhyme *light* – *write* gives good reason to suppose that digraph **gh** was no longer pronounced at the time the text was written.

### Discussion

In many instances the availability of extant texts is not sufficient to explain some phenomena of the language in question. That is why scholars may resort to studying related languages, (the comparative method) which have older written records as is the case, for example, with Gothic, namely the translation of the Bible made in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, while the earliest documents written in Old English date about 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. Besides related languages, English can be compared to other languages of the Indo-European family, namely those which came into contact with. For example, Latin and French.

Beowulf is an epic poem written in the Anglo-Saxon language, which was composed in the

eighth century and written down circa 1000 by an anonymous bard. The poem is the oldest surviving epic in English literature.

Part history and part mythology, the long narrative poem, which was written in England, relates the story of a great Scandinavian fifth century warrior, Beowulf, a Geat (Swede) whose fame 'far flew the boast of him'. [2, 4]

The only surviving manuscript dates to around 1010. This manuscript fortunately survived the Dissolution of the Monasteries under King Henry VIII and a disastrous fire which destroyed the library of Sir Robert Bruce Cotton a keen collector of old manuscripts. The story related in the poem occurred in the late fifth century, during the century after the Anglo-Saxons had begun to arrive in England, and tells of how for many years a monster by the name of Grendel had terrorized the hall, Heorot, of the Danish king, Hrothgar and his wife Wealhþeow. The monster descends at nightfall, while Hrothgar's court are sleeping, to feed on his retainers.

The poem is written in an alliterative verse, a style typical of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Alliteration is the repetition of initial sounds of words; Anglo-Saxon poetry does not possess stanzic form or rhyme. The mother tongue, from which Modern English descends, Anglo-Saxon, or English, as its speakers knew it, is closely related to Old Frisian and appears like an entirely different language to Modern English speakers.

Beowulf is as Language and Poetics

English is divided into three periods: Old English, Middle English, and Modern English. While many people think of Shakespeare's English as old, Shakespeare wrote and spoke Modern English, albeit, an early form of it. Chaucer's poetry, including his most famous work, The Canterbury Tales, are good examples of Middle English poetry. Beowulf, which probably dates to sometime between 700 – 1000 CE, is an Old English poem. Old English is sometimes known as Anglo Saxon.

It would be wrong to believe that the English language just changed from Old English to Middle English in 1100 and from Middle English to Modern English in 1500. These shifts took place over hundreds of years. It is

important to realize that the wide-spread notion of a standard language or even of standardized spelling are modern notions only made possible by the printing press. Not only did the printing press made wide-scale distribution possible, it provided the ability to fix language in time on a grand scale, thereby slowing down the process of language change.

However, while English was always changing, the dates 1100 CE and 1500 CE, while approximate, are significant for the English language. Although major grammatical and phonetic changes took place throughout the Old English period, the Norman invasion of 1066 and its resulting influx of French words into the language meant that the English of 1100 was much more different from the English of 1000 from the differences between the English of 900 and the English of 1000. Likewise, while English underwent a number of grammatical and phonetic changes throughout the Middle English period, the fifteenth century saw such a radical change in the pronunciation of English that 1500 serves as a useful date for the shift from Middle to Modern English. [4]

Old English makes use of unfamiliar letters, most of which derive from the runic alphabet, an alphabet used by the Germanic peoples. These letters are "þ" (thorn) and "ē" (eth) (often used interchangeably to represent the "th" sound of "that" and "thin"), "ā" (ash) (the vowel sound in cat), and wynn, which represents "w" and is rarely used in modern editions of Old English texts. If you look at a picture of the first page of Beowulf, you can see two capital wynn in the first line. They are the second and fifth letters:

While Old English can look foreign at first glance, it can also look and sound surprisingly modern when one knows a few basics. Consider, for instance, the sentence, which is repeated multiple times in Beowulf. "þæt god is godes godes" represents a "th" sound is the "a" in cat, and the "o" in god is pronounced just as if you were saying "go" but holding the "o" a little bit longer than you normally would. Knowing this it is not hard to recognize the first three words, as "That was good." While that last word may be a little more difficult, it is still recognizable. The "c" in cyning is pronounced as a "k" and the

word itself is pronounced just as if you were adding a "ing" to the word "kin" (kin + ing). Once you know how to pronounce cyning, it is not a stretch to see how the pronunciation of the Old English word could have simplified to our modern day "king."

Putting all this together, we can now recognize the Old English sentence to be our Modern English sentence "That was [a] good king."

Poetics

Note: No one translation of Beowulf will foreground or even have all the poetic elements that exist in the original Old English. A translation that tries to be true to the alliterative verse may have done so by ignoring such features as compounding, formulas, and even variation. Likewise, translations that try to represent the phrasing of Beowulf, and thereby preserving a sense of the formulas and variation, will often have little or no alliteration.

Alliteration: Alliteration is the repetition of stressed sounds, particularly consonants from the beginning of words or syllables. Poetically, alliteration can have a similar function as rhyme. An example of alliteration is the tongue-twister "She sells seashells by the sea shore."

Compounding: Old English poetry makes extensive use of compounding, the combining of two words to make a new word. An example is feorhseoc, literally "life-sick" (feorh = life, seoc = sick), which can be translated as mortally wounded. A more common example can be found in the first line of Beowulf: Gar-Dena, literally "Spear-Danes" (gar = spear, Dena = Danes). Compounding may be done to meet the needs of the alliterative meter, as part of a formula, or to make a new word. [2]

kennings: Kennings are a special form of compounding that are metaphoric in meaning. For example, the kenning banhus (ban + hus), literally "bone-house," refers to the human body; hronrad (hron + rad), literally "whale's road," refers to the sea; and rodores candel, literally "sky's candle," refers to the sun.

For a more detailed discussion of Old English poetics, including the rhythm of Old English alliterative verse, see chapters 13 and 14 of The Electronic Introduction to Old English, in this poem.

The epic Beowulf had been told by the Anglo-Saxons for over five hundred years before it was finally written down. As you read, see if you can understand why it has remained popular.

Here you can read even original version of the poem and its modern translation as its more understandable than before.

### **Anglo-Saxon Original (first lines of Prologue)**

Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum,  
 þeodcyninga, grim gefrunon,  
 hu ða æpelingas ellen fremedon.  
 Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,  
 monegum mægþum, meodosetla ofteah,  
 egsode eorlas. Syððan ærest wearð  
 feascraft funden, he þæs frofre gebad,  
 weox under wolcnum, weorðmyndum þah,  
 oðþæt him æghwylc þara ymsittendra

### **Modern translation**

Praise of the prowess of people-kings  
 Of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped,  
 We have heard, and what honor the athelings  
 won!

Oft Scyld the Scefing from squadron foes,  
 From many a tribe, the mead-bench tore,  
 Awing the earls. Since erst he lay  
 Friendless, a foundling, fate repaid him:  
 For he waxed under welkin, in wealth he  
 throve,

Till before him the folk, both far and near,  
 Who house by the whale-path, heard his  
 mandate,

Gave him gifts: a good king he!

Soon after Canute's death (1042) and the collapse of his empire, the old Anglo-Saxon line was restored but their reign was short-lived. The new English king, Edward the Confessor (1042-1066), who had been reared in France, brought over many Norman advisors and favourites; he distributed among them English lands and wealth to the considerable resentment of the Anglo-Saxon nobility and appointed them to important positions in the government and church hierarchy. [2, 3] He not only spoke French himself, but insisted on it being spoken by the nobles at his court. William, Duke of Normandy, visited his court and it was rumoured that Edward appointed him his successor. In many respects Edward

paved the way for Norman infiltration long before the Norman conquest. However, the government was still in the hands of Anglo-Saxon lords, headed by the powerful Earl Godwin of Wessex.

In 1066, upon Edward's death, the Elders of England (OE Witan) proclaimed Harold Godwin king of England. As soon as the news reached William of Normandy, he mustered a big army by promise of land and plunder (one third of his soldiers were Norman, others mercenaries from all over Europe), and with the support of the Pope, landed in Britain.

In the battle of Hasting, fought on October 14, 1066, Harold was killed and the English were defeated. A victory in battle by Alfred saved the English language, less than two hundred years later a defeat in battle by Harold threatened to destroy it. This date is commonly known as the date of the Norman

However, the main bulk of the population – the peasantry and the townspeople, and people in the countryside, those who lived in the Midlands and up north – spoke Anglo-Saxon (English) and looked upon French as foreign and hostile. Since most of the people were illiterate, the English language was almost exclusively used for spoken communication.

### **Conclusion**

Though literature is all this, the result of having read a piece of literary work is a sense of fulfillment, satisfaction and achievement. We recognize we are not alone in what we feel and think, for literature is the depiction of universal thoughts. We realize that men and women have the same emotions and react almost similarly cutting through time, space and matter. Literature intrigues our minds with its allusions, similes and metaphors. When we decipher them, we partake of the creative process.

Another important aim of this course is of a more theoretical nature. Study of the history of any language is based on applying general principles of linguistics to the language in question.

In my article, I tried to explain the importance of literature in humans' life and I tried to open the main meaning of this Anglo-Saxon poem

Beowulf. It is an epic poem written in the Anglo-Saxon language, which was composed in the eighth century and written down circa 1,000 by an anonymous bard. The poem is the oldest surviving epic in English literature.

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