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Origin/birth of English

Anglo Saxons (old English)

- England was ruled by Romans. The language used by them was Latin. After the decline of Roman Empire Germanic tribe invaded England.
- In 446 A.D the three tribes Angles, Saxons and Jutes invaded England. They were also called as the “Germanic tribe”.
- They had a common tongue/ language called Englisc, which became English later. Therefore English can be the mixture of the languages of these three tribes.
- The natives of the England were known as “Celts” and their language was “Celtic language”.

During this period 4 dialects were used

1. Northumbrian
2. Mercian
3. West Saxon
4. Kentish

- Northumbrian is used by Angles. Mercian and West Saxon were used by Saxon whereas Jutes used Kentish.
- These 4 dialects are mutually intelligible.
- During the rule of Germanic tribe different dialect gained supremacy in different period. However West Saxon was used in literary works in old English.
- The period of Anglo Saxon settlement is known as “OLD ENGLISH PERIOD”.
- King Alfred had great passion for literature. Therefore in the Old English period many great literary works were produced in old English.

Beowulf, Widsith, Deor, Waltere, The Fight of Finnsberg, Battle of Maldon.

- Poetry was also flourished

Ex- Juliana, Ellene, Christ and Satan, The Fates of the apostle and Judith.

- The glorious flowering of the Old English period came to an end with the arrival of Vikings known as “The Great Scandinavian invasion” in 750 A.D.

THE VIKINGS (750AD- 1050)

- The Vikings came from North European region, that is, Scandinavian Peninsula. They were also known as Scandinavians.
- The period of Scandinavian settlement of England is known as the “Viking Age”
- Their language was Norse but it was not popular like Englisc.
- The Vikings were sturdy, war-like, sea-faring people.
- Vikings included Danes and Norwegians as well.
- They invaded England and captured all the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms after winning several wars waged by Anglo Saxon king, King Alfred.

THE NORMAN CONQUEST AND EMERGENCE OF MIDDLE ENGLISH

- With the death of the Scandinavian king, King Cnut or Canute the Great, the era of Viking rule came to an end.

The Norman invasion took place after the decline of Vikings.

- The Norman invasion was the single most important event in English history. Politically and linguistically it was a French conquest of England.

MIDDLE ENGLISH

- The political and social statuses of both the languages changed greatly during this period.
- Three distinct sub-periods can be identified in the Middle English period
 1. Sudden decline in the status of English after the Norman conquest
 2. The gradual re-emergence of English as the national language.
 3. Rise of the standard form of the language super-imposed upon the many English dialects.

Sudden decline in the status of English after the Norman Conquest (1066- 1204)

- The linguistic situation in Britain after the Norman Conquest was complex.
- French was the native language of a minority of a few thousand speakers, but a minority with influence because they controlled the political, economic, religious and cultural life of England.
- The overwhelming majority of the population of England spoke English, but English had no prestige. Because Latin was the written language of the Church and of many secular documents and it was also spoken in the newly emerging universities and the Church.
- Within a short period of time after the conquest, there was fair amount of bilingualism in England. Even if the king had no English, most of the nobility would have had to learn English words in order to communicate with the Anglo Saxon people.
- Even if both the lord and his lady spoke only French, they had English speaking nurses for their children. Thus their children learnt English.
- Conversely many Anglo Saxon would have attempted to learn French as a means of improving their social and economic status.

Re-emergence of English 1204- 1348)

- Many factors contributed to the rise and prestige of English.
- One was the increased communication among English speakers.
- In the 13th and 14th centuries the children of French people did not speak French since the servants spoke English.
- In the 14th century English became the medium of instruction in schools (before this Latin was the medium).

Emergence of Standard English (1348-1509)

- Until the second half of the 14th century French remained the official language of England. Two events triggered the resurgence of English.

1. THE BLACK DEATH / BUBONIC PLAGUE-

- Occurred in 1348 and continued for many years.

- Many people died due to this.
- Because of high mortality rate, there was labour shortage. So surviving workers demanded higher pay for their labour.
- So ruling classes were forced to respect the lower classes because they needed them so badly.
- This respect to labourers increased the prestige of English language, which was the only language of the lower classes.

2. THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR BETWEEN ENGLAND AND FRANCE (1337-1453).

- English had a number of victories and started dominating.
- During this time French became a second language even among the nobilities.
- By the mid-14th century English was widely used as the language of instruction in schools.
- In 1362 English became the official language of legal proceedings.
- By the end of 14th century everyone in England spoke English. Even those who spoke French were bilingual in English.

Early modern English (1485-1714)

- Early Modern English is the stage of development of the English language from the late 15th century to the late 17th century.
- The establishment of the Tudor dynasty under Henry VII in 1485 after the battle of Bosworth, which ended the Wars of the Roses, resulted in a greater centralization of government in England.
- The 16th century was a century of the Reformation initiated in the 1530s under the reign of Henry VIII. He brought series of Parliament acts, which weakened England's religious and political bonds with Catholic Europe.
- The 17th century, in which England was governed by the House of Stuart, was a century of learning and discovery. The spread of the new science was promoted by the works of Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and by the Royal Society of London, a scientific society chartered in 1662 by King Charles II.
- The English colonial empire founded in the late 16th century expanded significantly during the 17th century.
- The colonization of North America, which started in the early seventeenth century, gave rise to American English.

- The Early Modern English period was concluded by the religious and political settlement of the Glorious Revolution (in 1688), which brought a political unity within the British Isles.
- The Early Modern English period was marked by a rapid growth of the printing industry.
- The art of printing was introduced into England by William Caxton, who set up the first printing press at Westminster in 1476.
- Printing made books cheaper, facilitated dissemination of texts written in English, and supported literacy among the population of England. It was one of the most important factors in the process of the standardization.
- Most publishing houses in the 16th and 17th centuries were located in London, therefore Standard English developed from the London dialect.
- The major grammatical changes that started during the Middle English period were completed during the 16th century.
- In 1604, Robert Cawdery published the first dictionary of the English language entitled "A Table Alphabetical".
- By the late 16th or early 17th century, when William Shakespeare wrote his works, the language had acquired most of its Modern English features.

Reference

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