

# An Analysis of Language Formation through Darwinian Studies

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**Abstract:** Language was known to be formed as a part of the human endeavor in recognizing, interpreting and expressing various phenomena in the nature of which his role is that of a mere piece of puzzle which forms the whole picture. In understanding the revolution that brought in the language that we use today one must have a firm grasp over the ever changing nature of language. Language is observed to be A volatile phenomena which never stays static and is always prone to change. Constant additions and subtractions are being done in the realm of languages as there is novelty in each human being which demands for the novelty in expression through language. Language changes its form and content from time to time, as Fredrick. T. Wood's well put observation in his Outline History of English Language of the nonsensical nature of Chaucerian stanzas from an excerpt taken from an earlier edition which would render the reader mute with its stark contrast on the dissimilarity of the English that we know and speak today. The same applies for every language. The modern French differs from the old French and so does the German that was in use a few centuries ago and the one that is currently in use. In the understanding of anything, one must travel back in time towards the origin. The origin of the formation of language could thus be tracked back to the observation and imitation of natural elements by our ancient forefathers. Various theories are at play which strives to explain this nature of imitation which led to a formation of continual sounds which eventually culminated into the formation of meaningful sounds that is language.

**Keywords:** Evolutionary Biology, Language Formation, Evolution of Language, Darwinism.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Various theories that underlie in the explanation of languages could be found in theories akin to the *Bow-Wow theory*, the *Ding-Dong theory*, the *Pooh-Pooh theory* and the *Gesture Theory*. The first two theories focused on the imitation of the elements of nature like the sound of a snake hissing or the sound of the rustling of words that lead to the formation of language which is after centuries observed to be holding the resemblance toward the object or the idea that it represents. E.g.: the hissing of snake eventually culminated into the word *Snake* which bears the hissing sound that our forefathers used to represent a snake. Examples could be found in words like water, puff, wind, whine, whistle, wail, etc...<sup>(3)</sup> Which also bears a resemblance to the idea or object that they represents in language.

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**Smt. Sonia,** Assistant Professor, Department of English and Languages, Amrita School of Arts and Sciences, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India. The third and the fourth theories on the origin of language points at involuntary gestures or sounds that we make along with the expression of an idea or the expression of a sudden emotion like fear, anxiety or sudden and unprecedented anger. A firm grasp over the origin of language which initiated in the observance and imitation of the nature along with the expression of the inherent sounds produced during intervals of excitement or fear, the ancient man learnt to communicate through an array of sound which may prove meaningless to the modern ears. Yet an understanding of this origin of meaningless sounds is necessary as we move on towards the study of the formation of meaningful sounds. The formation of English language as we know and speak today has undergone many alterations and reformations throughout the centuries. From the Anglo-Saxon era to the modern era English, as a language could be observed being plunged into degradation, and considered as the language of the uncouth. Each events from which it had risen up vigorously to become one of the most used languages of the modern times throughout the globe. This wane and rise of English as a language could be analyzed as a series of evolutions that shaped the language by the hammer wielding hands of time. This evolution of English language starts from as early as the times of the Angles and the Saxons which is distinguished as the first stage in the development of English language by historians. Language is observed to be liable for a revolution rather than evolution when it is under stress. The constant wars that raged through the Anglo-Saxon enough stress on their tongue which with each foreign invasion grew richer in form and content. This mode of an evolution in the English language which directly attaches to the stress that was put on by the constant wars and the new rulers of foreign origins could be seen as a reflection of yet another theory that lay not far from the language studies. In his studies on the origin and evolution of the rich fauna that roam the earth as being emanating from a common ancestor, Charles Darwin brought forth his theories through his seminal work "*On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*" (1859) through which Darwin explained the survival of the fittest species from its weak contemporaries, and the nature's take on ensuring this survival. A comparative reading between the evolution in biology based on natural selection and the evolution that took place in language formation as a result of the constant stress that was put upon it by the upheavals and territorial conflicts that was the norm of the day from time to time results in the realization of the striking similarities that both imbibe within themselves. The Angles and Saxons ruled the Britain from A.D. 600 to 1065



which mark the first milestone in the development of the English Language. They ruled over the existing Britons, the earliest inhabitants of the land for almost five centuries, a time ample enough which forced the native Briton tongue fade into the Anglo-Saxon language. The angles, Saxons and Jutes came pouring in over the Britons in hoards and the Celtic tongue which was the native tongue of the Britons came to an end. Many of them ran off to the hills of Wales, Cornwall and Scotland where their language flourished and in Britain, the language of the invaders became superior. Due to the isolated natures of the various tribes came with the angles and the Saxons the dialectical variations was stark in the languages of the Anglo-Saxons so much that the dialect of a northern man could prove nonsensical to someone from the west or south. But of all the dialects, the dialect of Wessex became the most important, due to two reasons. For one, the Wessex was the most civilized of all the kingdoms and secondly, most of the literature that wrote in the old English period was written in the dialect of the Wessex which includes the main work which still survives from the era, Beowulf.

## II. OBJECTIVES

Analyzing and teasing out the parallelisms that is salient in the theories of evolutionary biology put forward by Charles Darwin through his studies.

## III. HYPOTHESIS

The paper studies both the formation of English language from its early stages, the Old-English period to its present form and finds many facts that connects these adaptations and mutations that English language has gone through for years with the studies of Charles Darwin and his contributions towards Evolutionary Biology.

## IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Comparing and contrasting the Darwinist theories of evolution with that of the constant mutations and adaptations evidently have happened and still happening in the English Language with the help from "An Outline History of the English Language" a seminal work on the formation and evolution of English language by Fredrick T. Wood

## V. ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS:

### *Darwinian Theories in the Language formation*

In the establishment of Anglo-Saxons over the Britons and the wane of Celtic language along with the simultaneous rise of the Anglo-Saxon tongue points towards the direction of Darwinian studies of the survival of the fittest. The Britons were lesser in both numbers advancement than the invading Anglo-Saxons and for the precise reason they were perished and the fittest of the two forces established its province with their language, over the land of the Britons The Anglo-Saxon language took into consideration the influences of its conquered tongue; the Celtic donations towards Anglo-Saxon were negligible in nature. More prominent were the Latin influence which came from the Romans through the Celtic tribe. As the Celtic tribe was protected by the Preceding Romans just before the Anglo-Saxon conquest, the language of the Romans came oozing down into the

Anglo-Saxon tongue and from there, to modern English. In his Etymological Dictionary Walter Skeat observes one hundred and eight words which have come into the modern English from Latin through the Anglo-Saxons. where Henry Baily finds about four hundred words originating from the Latin origin through the Anglo-Saxon tongue. As the roman occupation mainly consisted of constructing monuments and building roads and bridges, words associated to the constructions and roads or bridges came from the Latin via Anglo-Saxons into the modern English. E.g. : the word for wall in modern English finds an origin in the Latin word vallum. Another innovation of the Romans consisted of the use of money instead of the barter system prevalent in the contemporary times, thus words relating to trading and money payments came through the Anglo-Saxons from the Romans to the modern English. E.g. : Words like pecuniary, finance and financial.

Christianity was yet another innovation by the Romans amidst the barbaric Britons. And with the conquest over Briton by the Anglo Saxons, words relating to Christianity found their origin in the Language of Romans. E.g.: 'Bishop' from the Latin episcopus. and 'Mass' from the Latin missa. Along with the Roman influence in the language of the middle English the influence of the Norse and Danish are also to be accounted into as Skeat finds more than five hundred words still in use which directly comes from the Norse influence in the English language. Towards the eighth century the Norse and Danish attacked the east coast of the land, establishing some settlements there, and it was King Alfred who put an end to the loots and plunders. King Alfred brought in a treaty which allowed the Danes to settle at the northern lines of England. The influence of the Norse and the Danes influenced the Anglo Saxon tongue in three ways

- The place names where the Norse settled were named from their language,
- New words were introduced from the Danish Norse origin
- A change in the pronunciation and grammar of the existing language.

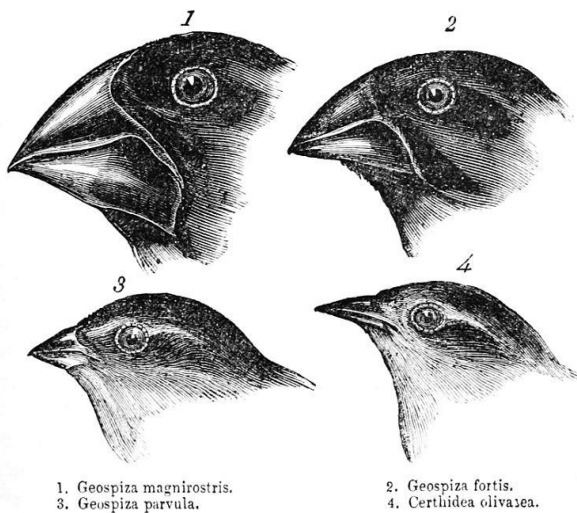
Many words that the Norsemen introduced attached themselves to English and travelled to the modern ages, words which we use in our daily speech like get and take both were introduced by the Danish settlers, the same is true for the pro nouns they and them. Husband is yet another word which hails from the Norse origin so is sister from the Norse word systur. Generally it is observed that the Saxon words come very near to our day-to-day lives Where it denotes some of the most common items we see and use in our vocabulary. E.g.: words for closer family relationships; Mother, Father, Sister Words that denote most of our staple foods; bread, butter, milk, meat, etc. Their daily life and associated words have found their way into the modern English. As the Anglo-Saxons were a simple folk with rudimentary weapons at hand, who lived a simple life, the weapons that they held were continued to be remembered in their name. E.g.; Simple kind of weapons like sword, spear, bow, arrow all came from the Anglo-Saxon tongue. In 66, marking the second milestone, a superior power came with a far-reaching influence on the English language which started with the Anglo-Saxons. In 1066 the Angles and Saxons were conquered by the invading Normans



and by 1100 the Normans have taken the control of the regions from the Anglo-Saxons and as a result of the Norman conquest, their language started to influence the native tongue of the Angles and Saxons. This conquest of William of Normandy brought profound changes to the English language. But the English language had come into contact with French even before the advent of William. It was in 1002 A.D when Aethelred married a French princess and brought home a handful of courtiers and artists with him when he came back to England. But it was only since the conquest of William, the French became a language of elite. The Norman French took the place which was enjoyed by the Anglo-Saxon tongue previously and the Anglo-Saxons continued to speak their native language. For some time the two languages existed side by side at the same time benefiting from each other. Gradually the French took over English as the court language and English now degraded itself as the language of the common folks. Four major changes happened to English throughout the Norman era was the changes that are observed in the grammar, pronunciation, Spellings and the various additions and changes to the vocabulary. The grammatical changes were mainly done with an objective to simplify the language. Reduction of inflections was one of the major changes that happened to the grammar of the Middle English. This was mostly noticeable in nouns. Another feature that aimed at the simplification of grammar was the substitution of the natural instead of the grammatical gender. Along with the grammatical changes, changes have also appeared in the pronunciation as well. The lengthening of short vowels when they stood in open syllables could be observed as one of the characteristic features of this. A second important feature to the changes in pronunciation is the production of the long vowels; E.g. the advent of words like *feet* originally pronounced roughly like the modern *fate*. Words like *food*, *boon*, *doom* (originally pronounced as rhyming with *mode*, *bone*, *dome*, etc) The changes in spelling and vocabulary could be found as the other significant modifications that are prominent in the English language of the Norman era. Where the vocabulary more than the spelling changed. The dual presence of vocabularies in a co-existent language environment gave rise to synonyms which originated in both the languages. The Normans have also introduced into the England the intricate modern English legal system and in here again the Normans provided the English language with novel words. E.g.: words which relate to the legal system; *trespass*, *cheat*, *treason*, *justice*, etc.. The third milestone came as a stress on the intellectual realm of man rather than a physical one. A change brought in by the Renaissance is widely considered as the third event that helped in molding the English language. The Renaissance established the Tudor dynasty in England and altered Chaucer from the English church. All these eventually found influences in the reshaping of the English language of the time. With each war that waged in the European soil a change within the language is apparent. The English language flourished with the Romans protecting the Britons, with the Anglo-Saxons conquering the Britons and the Normans defeating the Anglo-Saxons. At each interval, from each event the English language has adapted from the circumstances that it was put in, and as a language both structurally and grammatically sound, while languages which were till then considered as elite languages fell one by

one the English stood afloat despite the constant upheavals throughout time. In these dire circumstances that the English language has overcome one could observe the notion of the Darwinian survival of the fittest. English language adapted to the varying circumstances, it shed whatever that didn't suited the age, it adopted whatever lacked from its contemporaries and as a result English as a language survived with the characteristics of each parent language from which it imbibed nourishment. Darwinism was the sudden intellectual movement that followed the publishing of Darwin's theories. Many scientists who were intrigued by the explanations became staunch followers of Darwin and his theory on evolutionary biology. Darwin's theory was adapted by various disciples of studies in anthropology, social sciences and behavioral studies. Many defended the Darwinian theories but none were more successful than those who chose to explain Darwin's theories with the use of modern technology. The Neo-Darwinists propagated an explanation of Darwinian theories with a focus on Gene-Based view of evolution<sup>(5)</sup> with the help of the Neo-Darwinist take on evolutionary biology, Darwin's claims on the nature of evolution gained more grounds in relevance. The take of Neo-Darwinists in the studies of Darwin's theories gave him precedence even amongst the contemporary Darwin was especially famous for the research done in Evolutionary Biology, a branch of biology that studies the possible evolution from a common ancestor in hopes for explaining the diversities of life. Darwin brought in the research that he had done on the finches of the Galapagos Islands in order to prove his early theories of Evolutionary Biology. The finches in the island varied in their shape, strength and length of their head and beak. Darwin argued that all these varieties of finches had a common ancestor from whom they have slowly moved away from as they developed new traits that ensured their survival as a new species. Darwin found in these finches, despite of their obvious differences in shape and size, the traits of a common ancestor. Darwin proposed a theory of the evolution which was based on the stress that when applied on to a species either by the occurrence of nature, or by any external factors, resulted in a gradual journey of the particular species in a collective collaboration towards its own existence. Darwin found out that the stress that was applied on the finches of





1. *Geospiza magnirostris*.  
3. *Geospiza parvula*.  
2. *Geospiza fortis*.  
4. *Certhidea olivacea*.

**Darwin's finches or Galapagos finches. Darwin, 1845.**  
**Journal of researches into the natural history and geology of the countries visited during the voyage of H.M.S. Beagle round the world, under the Command of Capt. Fitz Roy, R.N. 2d edition. 1.**

Galapagos was the prime reason for their evolution. The stress that was applied on the finches was that of hunger. The ancestor finches were proved to have strong beaks and a strong skull, from analyzing the fossils that Darwin acquired from the Islands. The strong large beak and the large head of the ancestor finches owed to their nature of seeking food from the ground. They needed thick strong beak to turn stones and break twigs to find food under them. With little natural predators to keep the population stable, the finches grew largely in numbers and the food found ground was not enough to sustain them all. So some of the ancestor ground finches parted the others in search of food from trees, some took to cacti and its surroundings in search of food and the rest stayed on the ground. Some of the finches that moved towards the trees had comparatively smaller, sharp beak which aided in their search for insects under the barks of the trees while others in the group, with their large strong beak, perished. Their large beak, while perfect at scanning food in the ground, proved to be inadequate and futile against the strong bark of the trees. The finches that came after the survived finches had inherited the properties of their ancestors. The same method was applied on the cacti finches from which only the one with the longest beaks found existence while others perished, the ones that survived went on a journey to become a new species with key differences in the shape of their head, beak and body, traits which were passed down from each consecutive generations which ensured the continuity of its species. This process of evolution may appear sudden but in actuality was a process that is assumed to have happened over a time period of thousands of years. This idea of an applied stress that directly becomes the prime reason for an evolution is also observed in the formation of language throughout the centuries. Here the notion of a stress comes from the foreign invaders who come with their own language one which eventually assimilates into the existing language and becomes an integral part of it. The three main events that helped in shaping the formation of English language also provides with three milestones in the journey of the evolution of the old English towards the modern one that we are familiar with.

## VI. THE CULTURAL INFLUENCES OF THE EVOLUTION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The evolution of language could be observed as a phenomena which brings about a cultural change along with the changes in Language. Along the hundred years of the Norman Conquest this idea of a cultural alteration between the conquered and the conquerors is evident in the language used and is reflected crisply in the formation of a dual vocabulary in England, one that is used by the masters or identified with the masters contained words which found origin in the Norman French and the words in the language that the common people or the slaves used in the society found origin in the Anglo-Saxon tongue. E.g.: The words *wed* and *marry* the former is a native one and originally meant 'to give a pledge' while its French counterpart literally meant 'to become husband'. We are taken back to the Norman Conquest in analyzing the modern usages for words which denotes to a live animal and its meat after it is killed. Throughout the Norman ruling, the commoners looked after the animals and the names of the animals when they are alive came from the native tongue. E.g.: *sheep, goat, pig, cow, calf, etc.* The commoners reared the animals and the elite and the ruling ate them. Thus the names given after they are placed in neat plates comes from the Norman French; E.g.: *mutton, pork, beef, venison, etc* These reflections of cultural hegemony which portray the differences between the elite and the commoner were a significant characteristic of the evolution of language in the Norman ruling. The cultural delimitation of English as the language of the common people is evident also in the French supremacy over the English in the courts of England from where English had stepped down after momentary standing abreast with the foreign language. The French could be seen influencing the concepts of the judiciary, the law enforcement and the religion. The French have implemented a modern judiciary system which provided the English language with words of French origin. E.g.: *judge, jury, verdict... etc...* The Normans have brought forth law enforcement from which English gained French originated words which related to the nature of law enforcement E.g.: *prison, prisoner, punish, etc...* They have built churches and propagated their religion and from which the English language had borrowed sundry words E.g.: *priest, abbot, canon, curate, etc...* The cultural influences that are a salient feature of a conquest is reflected in the language which undergoes a change due to the event.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Charles Darwin brought in his theories on evolutionary biology as a means to explain the diversity in life seen roaming the earth. He propagated a view of the 'survival of the fittest' and 'the theory of natural selection' as the means of this observed diversity, in which he noted the ability of a life form to surpass the dire circumstances as the means towards the culmination of a new species which will inherit the properties of its ancestors and continue to exist until a novel crisis staggers it from its path. Darwin points his fingers towards the notion of stress that breeds the evolution. It was the stress in the form of famine that brought evolution into the finches that he studied. This notion of a stress could be



clearly observed in the evolution of language also.

The survival of the English language which rose above irrespective of the amount of struggles and upheavals that it met with by adapting, adopting and shedding its characteristic features according to each era, could be analyzed with the evolutionary biology theories that Charles Darwin had brought forth. The Darwinist theories portray the survival of the fittest and the fittest is determined with its ability to adapt to and overcome unfamiliar circumstances. While other elite languages like the Greek and the Latin faded into oblivion after centuries and is only treated and learned to decrypt the ancient manuscripts, English stands rooted to its soil and have spread to almost every place around the globe.

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