

Core Course I – History of the English Language

The general aim of this paper is to make the student become aware of the diachronic dimension of language study.

The objectives are :

1. To familiarise the student with theories regarding the origin of language [in general, not with specific reference to any one particular language].
2. To make the student understand the historical / linear processes of the evolution of the English language and the place of English in the Indo European family of languages.
3. To make the student grasp the fact that other languages and external phenomena contributed largely to the development of the English language.
4. To make the student realize that language is a dynamic phenomenon by making her / him focus on changes in sounds and in the meanings of words and on the strategies of coining new words.
5. To make the student comprehend how a polemic approach has been built around the concept of the “Standard” form of the English language and how each variety has a claim to privilege in terms of use and acceptance of variations.

The graded unitization of this paper gives the student an idea about the impact of socio-political and cultural phenomena on the structure, growth and evolution of the English language.

Syllabus

Unit I

Theories on the origin of Language – Language as a system – Proto Indo European and Indo European family of languages – Grimm’s Law and Verner’s Law – Origin and Development of the English language.

Unit II

Change of meaning of words (processes and history) – Formation of new words (processes and strategies) – stability and flux of word-form and word-meaning.

Unit III

Influences on English – Greek, Latin, French, German, Scandinavian, Celtic, Norse.

Influence of writers on English - Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth.

Influence of phenomena on English - Renaissance, World Wars, Science and technology.

Unit IV

Slang, idiolect, dialect, idiomatic English, Standard English.

Pidgin, Creole, Lingua franca.

Unit V

British English (as standard English) – American English and its distinctive features – areas of difference between British and American English – Indian English, Varieties and major differentiating features (pronunciation, accent, Intonation, grammar, structure).

Reference:

1. A.C. Baugh : History of the English Language
2. L. Wrenn : The English language
3. Otto Jespersen : Growth and Structure of the English Language.