

A Study on the Evolution of the English Alphabet

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Introduction

At present, English is considered as a global language due to many reasons. 1/5 of the world population speaks English as a first language, second language and foreign language all over the world. It is, therefore, very significant to investigate the different linguistic aspects of such a prominent language. The present study is based on the evolution of the alphabet of the English language. It is much simpler than that of the other languages and it is thus easy to apply. It has been found that the modern English alphabet is a Latin alphabet comprising 26 letters. This has been undergoing numerous changes during the periods of Old English (mid-5th Century to mid-12th Century), Middle English (late 11th Century to about 1470) and Modern English (From 1470 onwards). Throughout

this prolonged period, the English alphabet seems to have tremendously changed. The number of letters and shape of letters have been subject to these changes. The modern alphabet is the outcome of this change.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the present study was to investigate how the English alphabet had undergone various changes since Anglo Saxon or Old English period. When we compare the modern English alphabet with the Old English and Middle English alphabet, we can observe that the present alphabet has undergone tremendous changes.

Research Methodology

The present study was entirely based on the secondary data. Related facts and relevant information were collected from

journals, magazines, research papers, books and websites. A library survey was conducted regarding the present study. More reference activities were done in order to investigate the history of the English Language focusing attention on the periods of Old English, Middle English and Modern English.

Literature Review

The following chart indicates the similarities between the ancient alphabet used by different people all over the world and the modern alphabet. Ancient Hebrews, Egyptians, Middle Greek people used their alphabet as the chart shows, which is absolutely confused and complex. Nevertheless, many ancient letters seem to be similar to the modern letters, which are presently used. When the chart is closely examined it is obvious that the shapes of the letters are similar to the present alphabet. Some letters are inverted and different from the shapes. Still, we can easily identify them as English alphabet.

During the Old English period, four languages influenced the

English Language, namely, Celtic, Scandinavian, Latin, and Greek Languages. According to following chart, it is apparent that Greek language had its own alphabet. Some letters in the Greek alphabet seem to be similar to the modern English alphabet.

During this period, when we closely observe the English alphabet, we can perceive that some modern letters in the English alphabet are not present. But, as time passes by, the English alphabet seems to have increased up to 26 letters. This is how the evolution process in the English alphabet gradually occurred. The following chart clearly substantiates this phenomenon.

The Evolution of the English Alphabet Chart shows how over the last 4000 years the English alphabet along with at least 13 other major alphabets has evolved out of the Ancient Hebrew alphabet. The harmony in graphology (shape) of the letters of the alphabets is strikingly similar from alphabet to alphabet.

Evolution of the English Alphabet

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
																			†
Α	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	A
Β	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	Ɱ	B
Γ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	Ɐ	G ^c
Δ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	Ɒ	d
Ε	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	ⱱ	E
Υ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	Ⱳ	U ^{WY} Y ^V
Ζ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱳ	Z
Η	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	ⱴ	H
Θ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	Ⱶ	θ TH
Ι	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱶ	i'
Κ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	ⱷ	K
Λ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	ⱸ	L
Μ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	ⱹ	M
Ν	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	ⱺ	N
Χ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	ⱻ	X
Ο	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	ⱼ	O
Ρ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	ⱽ	P
Σ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	Ȿ	S
Q	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Ɀ	Q
R	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	R
Σ ^{SH}	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	ⲁ	Σ ^{SH}
†	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	†

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(Evolution of the English Alphabet Chart posted by Jane E Lythgoe on March 13, 2008.)

Results, Discussion and Conclusion

When the history of the English Language is carefully examined, it

is obvious that the English alphabet during the periods of Old English and Middle English was confused and there were many unnecessary

letters in it. But, as time passed by, the number of letters was reduced and the shape of letters gradually changed and became both capital letters and simple letters as we find them today. Some letters remain the same as they were earlier. When we closely observe the above chart, it is quite clear. At present, it is extremely limited to 26 six capital letters and simple letters. The simple letters, "a" and "g" in the English alphabet, are written in a different way. The forms of such letters are quite different as we find them in the alphabet. Most probably, the shapes of these two letters will also change as they are used in the present writingsystem. At present, these two letters are not used as we see them in printed form. Anyway, it is assumed that evolution of the English alphabet will never stop. It will continue with new letters and new shapes. This is a non-ending process as the alphabets of the other languages also undergo changes. This is a universal phenomenon.

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