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THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SWEDISH LANGUAGE: FROM THE VIKINGS TO THE MODERN AGE

The human experience is unique amongst all animals due to our ability to communicate using languages. With over seven thousand languages spoken across the globe, it is understandable that many languages rarely become of widespread interest. However, this does not make them any less important, or any less fascinating. One such language that does not often see the spotlight is Swedish.

The Swedish language underwent a long process of evolution to reach its current form. It has its roots in Old Norse, which was common to the Nordic countries prior to the 9th century AD. Around the year 800 began what is considered the first differentiation of Swedish as a language from Old Norse. With the advent of the Viking Age, dialects of Old Norse developed across Scandinavia. One dialect found in Sweden became Runic Swedish (*runsvenska*), and was spoken between the years 800 to 1225. The reason for its name is that most texts from the era are written in the runic alphabet.

During the Middle Ages, the runic alphabet was progressively abandoned in favor of the Latin alphabet, a change that was brought by the introduction of Christianity to the Nordic countries. At the start of the era, most texts were written in Latin. This would be changed by King Magnus Eriksson, who introduced a law which dictated that legal and trade documents be written in Swedish. As a result, an increasing number of texts began to be written in Swedish. Thus began "Old Swedish" (*fornsvenska*), the further development of which was influenced by a particular external factor, the popularity of the German language. Words such as *Arbeit* (work) or *bleiben* (become), were quickly adopted from German and adapted to Swedish forms (*arbete, bli*). It was also during this period that the Swedish alphabet gained three letters that today fascinate learners of the language: Å, Ä, and Ö.

Old Swedish was followed by Modern Swedish (*nysvenska*). Modern Swedish began with the first translation of the New Testament from Latin to Swedish in 1526. With this change,

Swedish became the official language of religion in the country. In 1732 Olof von Dalin began publishing the newspaper *Then Swänska Argus,* which was written in a simpler language more closely related to the spoken form, allowing it to be read by a wider audience. These texts played an important role in establishing a more casual form of written Swedish. Similar to the way German influenced Old Swedish, the French language had its impact on Modern Swedish, gifting it words such as *enorm* (enormous), *mamma* (mom), and *vag* (vague).

Since the beginning of the 20th century, Swedish has increasingly been influenced by the English language, particularly following the Second World War. A multitude of words have been borrowed and adapted to fit the Swedish pronunciation, such as e-mail which has become *mejl,* tough which has become *tuff,* and date which has become *dejt*. Due to changing patterns of immigration to Sweden, Swedish has in recent years been increasingly influenced by languages such as Arabic, with particularly slang words used by younger generations being adopted from these new language influences. An additional pattern in modern years has been the change from formal to informal language, where direct and familiar conversation is the norm. This started in the 1960s with 'du-reformen' (the you-reform), where *du* (you) began to be used instead of formal address – comparable to the Ukrainian 'ти' versus 'ви'.

As described, the Swedish language has a rich history with many external influences. With every step of its evolution, Swedish has accumulated borrowed words from foreign languages. Each of these adopted words has in turn enriched the language and pushed its development forward. With such a fascinating history, what the future holds for the development of Swedish language is exciting to imagine.

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