

# Language Change

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# *Languages Change With Time*

1. Linguistic changes are slow.
2. We know a great deal of the English language because it has written records.

3. Changes in a language refer to changes in the grammars of the speakers of the language, including phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, and semantic components of the grammar.

# *The Regularity of Sound Change*

1. The regular sound correspondences are due to the changes in the languages' phonological system. It's sounds that change, not words.

2. Regular sound correspondences can be found among older and newer forms of English, different languages as well as dialects of one language. There are also regular sound correspondences in the Native American languages Cree and Ojibwa.

3. Genetically related languages were dialects of the same languages at an earlier stage. That is, they developed from the same “parent” language. For example, English and French are genetically related languages.

4. An interaction of phonological rules may result in the addition or loss of phonemes and in changes in the lexicon.

# *Morphological Change*

1. The suffix-ize means “to make---“ :

finalize    □    to make final

privatize   □   to make private

2. Classical Latin case endings were added to a noun stem according to its function in the sentence.

# *Syntactic Change*

1. Modern English is an SVO(Subject-Verb Object) language. The syntactic rules permit less variation in word order. In Modern English, negation is expressed by adding not or do not. We may also express negation by adding words like never or no:

I am going            ☐ I am not going

I went                ☐ I did not go

I go to school        ☐ I never go to school.

I want food.         ☐ I don't want any food;

I want no food.



## 2. contraction rules:

do not    □    don't

will not   □   won't

ME : the negative element occurs at the  
end of the word because “not” is  
put after the auxiliary

OE : the negative element occurs at the  
beginning of the contraction because  
it preceded the auxiliary in  
sentences.

### 3. “comparative” and “superlative” constructions:

ME : We form the comparative by adding - er to the adjective or by inserting more before it, the superlative is formed by adding – est or by inserting most.

OE : Double comparatives and double superlatives occur, which today are ungrammatical : more gladder, more lover, most royallest.

# *Lexical Change*

Lexical changes include:

(1) the addition of new words

(2) changes in the meanings of words

(3) the loss of words

# 1. New Words

Methods to form new words:

(a) Compounding: the recombining of old words to form new ones with new meanings.  
ex. bigmouth, chickenhearted, egghead ... etc.

(b) Derivational processes  
ex. Uglify □ uglification  
finalize □ finalization

(c) Other methods: word coinage, deriving words from names, blends ... etc.

## 2. Borrowings

Borrowing from other language is another important source of new words. It occurs when one language takes a word or morpheme from another language and adds it to the lexicon.

(a) Two divisions:

(i) native words

(ii) nonnative words (loan words)

(b) Ways:

(i) directly      ex. Feast

(ii) indirectly   ex. Algebra

(c) Introduce what languages did English  
borrow from ? Similarly, other languages  
borrow words.

e.x. Japanese from Chinese and European words  
(esp. American English)

### 3. Loss of Words

A word is lost through inattention:  
nobody thinks of it; nobody uses  
it; and it fades out of the language.

## 4. Semantic Change

(a) Broadening: become wider and general  
ex. Holiday, picture

(b) Narrowing: become specific  
ex. Meat, deer

(c) Meaning shifts  
ex. Bead, silly



# *Reconstructing “Dead” Languages*

1. The branch of linguistics that deals with how languages change, what of changes occur, and why they occurred is called historical and comparative linguistics.
2. In 1786 Sir William Jones suggested the three languages (Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin) had the same origin.

3. Rasmus Rask pointed out the relationships among Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, Persian, Germanic, Lithuanian, and Armenian. He was the first scholar to describe formally the regularity of certain phonological differences between related languages.

4 . Grimm's Law can be expressed in terms of natural classes of speech sounds:

- (a.) voiced aspirates    ☐ deaspirated
- (b.) voiced stops        ☐ voiceless
- (c.) voiceless stops    ☐ fricatives

## 5. Verner's Law:

When the preceding vowel was unstressed, f, T, and x underwent a further change to b, d, and □.

## 6. Neo-Grammarians:

They viewed linguistics as a natural science and believed that laws of sound change were unexceptionable natural laws.

7. Stammbaum (family tree) theory:

Some linguists thought that languages had a “life cycle” and developed according to evolutionary laws. Each language can be traced to a common ancestor.

8. The comparative method is the method of reconstruction of a parent language from a comparison of its daughters.

9. Nineteenth-century linguistic, beginning with August Schleicher in 1861, were able to initiate the reconstruction of the long-lost parent language so aptly conceived by Jones, Bopp, Rask, and Grimm. That is the language called Indo-European.

# *Why Do Languages Change?*

1. No one knows how or why languages change.
2. Linguistic changes do not happen suddenly; changes are more gradual, particularly changes in the phonological and syntactic system.

3. A basic cause of change is the way children acquire the language.
4. The reason for some changes are relatively easy to understand.
5. Phonological changes in languages:
  - (a) Some sounds and combinations of sounds are “earlier to pronounce” than other.
  - (b) Vowels are frequently nasalized before nasal consonants.

6. Internal borrowing:

We borrow from one part of the grammar and apply the rule generally. It is also called analogic change.

7. Many factors contribute to linguistic change: simplification of grammars, elaboration to maintain intelligibility, borrowing and lexical additions.

8. Language changes for the same reason all things change: that it is nature of things to change.