Asst. Inst. Muna Essam Abdullah

Tikrit University/ College of Education for Humanities/ English Department

* Corresponding author: E-mail :
muna.e.abdullah@tu.edu.iq

07707516182

The Stages of Language Change

A B S T R A C T

Language evolves naturally, adapting to societal standards, cultural influences, education levels, social dynamics, and technology. This study focuses on internal language changes by examining the historical development of specific words within their evolutionary context. Initially, changes occur in individuals' behaviors, aiming to communicate effectively. Innovative tendencies within familiar groups lead to further modifications. Eventually, distinct linguistic variations emerge, even among languages with a shared ancestry.

مراحل تغييرات اللغة

م.م منى عصام عبدالله /جامعة تكريت/كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية/قسم اللغة الانكليزية

الخلاصة:

اللغة تتطور بشكل طبيعي، متكيفة مع المعايير الاجتماعية والتأثيرات الثقافية ومستويات التعليم والديناميات الاجتماعية والتكنولوجيا. يركز هذه الدراسة على التغيرات اللغوية الداخلية من خلال دراسة التطور التاريخي لكلمات محددة ضمن سياقها التطوري. في البداية، تحدث التغييرات في سلوكيات الأفراد بهدف التواصل الفعال. تميل الاتجاهات المبتكرة داخل المجموعات المألوفة إلى المزيد من التعديلات. في نهاية المطاف، تظهر تغيرات لغوية مميزة، حتى بين اللغات ذات الأصل المشترك.

Introduction

Differences in speech between generations are evident everywhere, as language is constantly evolving. This applies to all languages, as no living language remains static. The multitude of factors influencing language change is vast, making it difficult to control or predict most changes, often appearing as historical accidents. Latin, for example, could have retained its cases by implementing morphological changes to preserve case distinctions, despite phonological erosion. To comprehend language change, it is essential to identify non-random phenomena and discover universals of language change (Haspelmath, 2004: 18).

1. Language Historical Changes and Development

Language is a dynamic entity that undergoes constant change over time. This change impacts various aspects, including vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and sentence structure. While these changes may not be immediately noticeable in day-to-day conversations, historical evidence confirms their existence. Language change is influenced by numerous factors, but our ability to control them is limited, leading to many change events appearing as unpredictable accidents. For example, Latin could have preserved its grammatical cases through modifications, but it ultimately lost them. Understanding language change requires identifying consistent patterns and universal principles that govern the evolution of languages (Haspelmath, 2004: 18).

Language change occurs at varying rates in different locations, but it is an inevitable process driven by various factors. From one generation to the next, pronunciations evolve, new words are introduced or created, the meanings of existing words shift, and grammar undergoes development or decline. Linguists study both contemporary language variations and the historical development of languages to gain insights and understanding. This essay will explore the causes and types of changes in the English language. Politics, social dynamics, cultural shifts, technology, environment, and morality are among the many factors that contribute to language change (Jones & Singh, 2005:68). The notion of isolated

communities preserving a pure form of Elizabethan or any other historical English is a myth. No one has spoken Elizabethan English since the time of Queen Elizabeth I, around 400 years ago. Similarly, there are no living individuals who speak Minangkabau English the way it was spoken by past figures such as Yahya Datuak Kayo, Syekh Djamil Djambek, Agus Salim, or Buya Hamka (Trask, 2010: 1).

Likewise, a comprehensive study of word origins and historical linguistics reveals that the term "lovely" has undergone multiple meanings over time, including "ignorant," "fastidious," and "precise." Examining the works of Shakespeare uncovers words that have either disappeared or undergone significant semantic shifts, such as "hie" (meaning "to hurry"), "stilly" (meaning "softly"), and "arrant" (meaning "thorough"). Even in the era of Jane Austen, the meanings of words had already evolved. In her novels, a "pleasing prospect" often referred to a scenic view rather than an expectation, and being "sensible" meant being aware or perceptive.

2. Types of English Language Change

Language change encompasses various types, including lexis (word), semantics (meaning), phonology (sound), and syntax (grammar), each of which presents its own complexities for study. An illustrative instance of language change can be found in Pohnpei, where the "high language" used to show respect towards the royal clan and when addressing them is gradually fading away, as fewer individuals possess the ability to speak it (Tawerilmang, 1996, p. 77).

2.1 Lexical and Semantic Change

Lexical change pertains to the usage of different words in contemporary language compared to those used in the past. Semantic change, closely related to lexical change, involves alterations in the meaning associated with words. It is one of the most common types of language change and is easily observable. For example, an older individual might use the term "wireless" to refer to "radio," while a younger person would associate "wireless" with technologies like phones and laptops (McMahon, 1994, p. 90).

Semantic change, also referred to as semantic shift, encompasses the transformation of word usage over time. It involves a shift in the contemporary meaning of a word, which diverges from its original usage.

.

Below are a few examples of semantic change;

1. The term "awful" originally meant to inspire wonder or fear, but its contemporary usage generally carries a negative connotation.
2. Originally referring to a popular leader, the word "demagogue" now implies a politician who manipulates emotions and prejudices.
3. The word "gay" underwent a change from its previous meaning of brightness and cheerfulness to primarily representing homosexuality today.
4. The term "guy" initially described someone with a grotesque appearance, but it gradually transformed into a general reference for a male person. In recent times, it has expanded to include mixed-gender groups.

5. Initially indicating something remarkably good, "egregious" has evolved to signify something remarkably bad or flagrant (McMahon, 1994, p. 175).

2.2 Syntax Change (Grammar)

Throughout history, grammatical constructions have undergone changes. When compared to vocabulary change, English syntax has proven to be relatively slow in its evolution. Vocabulary changes can be seen as more superficial and temporary. Modern English grammar differs from Old English in several aspects. For instance, Old English made a distinction between genders, where the third person singular demonstrative nominative pronoun had three forms: /se/ for masculine, /paet/for neuter, and /seo/ for feminine. However, in modern English, there is only one form for the third person singular demonstrative pronoun, /that/, regardless of case or gender (Rowe & Levine, 2009, p. 359).

2.3 Phonological Change (SOUND)

Sound change is a fundamental aspect of language evolution, encompassing phonetic and phonological alterations. It refers to the shifts and transformations

that occur in the pronunciation of sounds over time. These changes can affect individual sounds, sound patterns, and even the entire phonological system of a language. Sound change is a natural and ongoing process that contributes to the diversity and development of languages throughout history. It encompasses modifications in the pronunciation of sounds, including the substitution of phonetic features, which can result in the complete loss of original sounds and the introduction of new ones. English pronunciation is subject to gradual change, influenced by both geographical factors and social variations among speakers.

The notion that all educated individuals speak with Received Pronunciation (RP) is no longer accurate, if it ever was. English pronunciation now reflects a range of dialects and accents, indicating the diverse linguistic landscape. Over time, an individual's speech can be influenced by their surroundings, leading to gradual shifts in pronunciation. This is evident in cases where British individuals quickly adopt an American accent (Aitchison, 1991, p. 108).

Here are a few examples of sound changes based on different periods:

Early Twentieth Century:

The vowel in words like "cloth" and "cross" shifted from the vowel sound in "thought" to the vowel sound in "lot."

The distinction between words like "flaw" and "floor" became less pronounced.

The quality of the "long O" vowel changed in words like "goat," "home," and "know."

Mid Twentieth Century:

Words like "sure," "poor," and "tour" started to sound identical to "shore," "pour," and "tore."

The weak vowels in words like "visibility" and "carelessness" shifted away from the sound of "kit."

A t-sound began to be inserted in words like "prince," making it sound like "prints."

Late Twentieth Century:

The vowel sound at the end of words like "happy," "coffee," and "valley" became tenser.

The lip-rounding and backness of the "OO" sounds in words like "goose" and "foot" diminished.

The glottal stop started to occur in a wider range of phonetic environments, such as in phrases like "not only" and "but also" (Wells, 1999:79).

These examples demonstrate how sound changes can occur across different time periods, resulting in shifts in vowel sounds, consonant distinctions, and phonetic patterns within a language.

2.4 Spelling Change

In contrast to many other countries, neither the United States nor Great Britain have regulatory bodies dedicated to preserving their national languages. The English language undergoes changes influenced by factors such as the publication of new dictionaries, the language usage in media, and the emergence of colloquial terms. Throughout the history of the English language, spelling changes have occurred, and here are a few examples of such transformations.

Table (1) Spelling Change

Spelling during 17 and 18 century	Re-spelling
Avice	advice
Samon	Salmon
Crume	Crumb
aventure	Adventure
Nevew	Nephew

When exploring changes in English spelling, it's important to consider the differences between British and American English. These variations often arise from the historical influence of French on the English language. In British English, many words with French origins maintain their original spellings, while in American English, there is a tendency to spell them phonetically. Here are a few examples that highlight these distinctions.

British (-our) VS. American (-or) difference	British (-re) VS. American (-er) difference	British (-ae/-oe/-oeu) VS. American (-e/ -o/ -eu)
savior/ savior	spectre/specter	toxaemia/ toxemia
armour/ armor	centre/ center	mediaeval/ medieval

rumour/ rumor	theartre/ theater	manoeuvre/maneuver
behavior/ behavior	metre/ meter	oestrogen/estrogen
labour/ labor	litre/ liter	paediatric/pediatric
colour/ color	fibre/fiber	mementoes/mementos
neighbour/ neighbor archaeology/archeology		lustre/luster
favourite / favorite	centimetre/centimeter	
humour/ humor	kilometer/ kilometer	
flavour/ flavor	louvre/ louver	

Discussion

Mistakes regarding the differences between British English and American English spellings can occasionally occur, even among British speakers. The main distinction lies in the treatment of words borrowed from other languages, particularly French and German, which are typically spelled as they are in British English. In contrast, spellings in American English are often based on the phonetic pronunciation of words. English was brought to what is now America by British colonizers in the 17th century, and since then, multiple waves of immigration have greatly influenced the evolution of the language in the United States.

2.5 Progress or Decay Language Change

Undoubtedly, language plays a crucial role in ethnic identity, with individuals strongly identifying themselves as members of a particular social group through their attachment to language. When a low prestige language is associated with an ethnic group, it becomes more vulnerable to being replaced by a high prestige language, such as English, particularly when accompanied by a negative ethnic identity. Language shift is often socially challenging in the modern world.

The older generation often perceives linguistic change as negative, believing that language has deteriorated over time. In the eighteenth century, influential

figures expressed concerns about the serious decline of the English language and advocated for the establishment of a national institution to establish rules and prevent further decay. Each language is intricately connected to a unique worldview, belief system, and literature, regardless of whether it is written or not. A language represents the accumulation of thousands of years of a people's experiences and wisdom. Language use is a daily, individual choice that determines whether a language thrives or becomes extinct (Kulick, 1994, p:7).

2.6 Causes of language change

Languages undergo changes due to various factors, including political pressures, technological advancements, and social, cultural, and moral influences. These factors contribute to the evolution of the English language.

2.6.1 Political Factor

Language change often has political origins, which can be attributed to factors such as human migration and invasion. When individuals relocate to a new country and learn a different language, they acquire it with certain imperfections. These slight deviations are then passed on to their children and social circles, gradually altering the language itself (Aitchison, 1991, p. 109).

In addition to language changes influenced by migration, politics also play a role in shaping language through public debates. For instance, the increasing awareness of environmental issues and the implementation of environmental policies in recent decades have given rise to numerous new words and phrases. Terms like "tree-hugger," "eco-friendly," "carbon footprint," "greenwashing," "locavore," "eco-terrorism," and "green collar jobs" have emerged as a result (Aitchison, 1991, p. 109).

The liberation of women and the ongoing struggle for gender equality have also brought about significant language changes. Present-day student writers are encouraged to use gender-neutral and gender-inclusive nouns and pronouns, treating both women and men in an equitable manner. Examples include using "police officer" instead of "policeman," "firefighter" instead of "fireman," and "humankind" instead of "mankind" (P:411).

2.6.2 Technology Factor

The rapid advancements in technology have made it challenging for English language users to keep up with new vocabulary and expressions. Language naturally evolves over time, but the internet has accelerated this process even further. For instance, completely new words like "to google" and "facebooking," which are not yet included in the Oxford English Dictionary, have gained widespread usage (Duffy, 2003, p. 32). However, not all of these new words and slang terms will endure indefinitely. Terms that were considered novel just a decade ago, like "floppy disk," are now rarely used in today's conversations as they have been replaced by "memory stick."

The online environment often showcases linguistic creativity, with internet users inventing and manipulating language, leading to the rapid development of computer-related slang. Additionally, the language used in text messaging has introduced a new form of abbreviation, such as LOL (laugh out loud), BFF (best friends forever), IMHO (in my humble opinion), and OMG (oh my God). These terms, used by millions in texts, emails, and instant messages, have been recognized and added to the Oxford Dictionary, legitimizing their usage (Yoskowitz, 2011, p. 66).

2.6.3 Social Factor

Changes in politics, economics, and technology often lead to broader social changes, and these social changes, in turn, influence language. When society undergoes transformations, language adapts accordingly, producing distinct effects. In every society, there are individuals who possess social prestige, power, and wealth, while others have limited access to these resources. Factors such as occupation, education level, income, and residential environment contribute to different social statuses, with varying degrees within each category. People with different social statuses perceive and respond to things differently, leading to variations in vocabulary and phrases they use (Finegan & Rickford, 2004: 62).

For instance, individuals who are economically disadvantaged and lack access to education or who grew up in rural areas where proper grammar wasn't emphasized may not speak as eloquently as those from higher social backgrounds. Even within a small community, variations in speech can occur based on factors such as age,

gender, and ethnicity, as no two individuals speak identically. Through interactions and social exchanges, people acquire new words and incorporate them into their speech patterns. Some of these linguistic changes spread throughout the population, gradually altering the language itself (Anonymous, 2011: 89). The words and phrases used by previous generations, such as our parents or grandparents, may not be the same as those we use today.

2.6.4 Foreign Influence Factor

One of the primary reasons for languages to borrow words from one another is when they need to refer to new concepts or objects that have been introduced to their speakers. For instance, the English word "pizza" was adopted from Italian when the food itself became popular among English-speaking communities. Similarly, the term "glasnost" was borrowed from Russian to convey the concept of openness and frankness in Soviet political life during the era of Gorbachev, which was unfamiliar to English speakers until then.

While borrowing is a common phenomenon, not all loanwords become permanent additions to the borrowing language. Many loanwords are temporary and eventually fade away. However, a borrowed word is more likely to be retained if it represents an object or idea for which there is no existing word in the borrowing language, as exemplified by the word "pizza" mentioned earlier (P:32)

, a few examples of common words borrowed from other languages.

-hammock, hurricane, maize, tobacco (Caribbean)

 -gull (Cornish)

-howitzer, robot (Czech)

 -paprika (Hungarian)

-bonsai, sumo, origami (Japanese)

-bamboo, ketchup, orang-utan (Malay)

-paradise, lilac, bazaar, caravan, chess, shawl, khaki (Persian)

-taboo, tattoo (Polynesian)

-flamingo, marmalade, veranda (Portuguese)

 -mammoth, soviet, vodka (Russian)

-coffee (Turkish)

Conclusion

English, being a global language used in education and spoken in numerous nations, is currently undergoing rapid changes. It is one of the languages experiencing the most significant transformations worldwide. As English continues to be spoken by an increasing number of people, its impact on linguistic change becomes more pronounced. This evolution is beneficial as it facilitates international trade, travel, and interactions between countries, making it easier for individuals in business and other fields to communicate effectively.

Without language change, the existing language gap would be even wider, hindering communication between people of different cultures, understandings, and pronunciation patterns. In a world characterized by diverse languages and religions, language evolution is necessary for humans to navigate and engage with one another. Without language change, individuals would face significant challenges and disorientation in this diverse global landscape.

REFERENCES

Anonymous. (2011). Science Daily: Interaction is Criticle for the Evolution of the Language. Article retrieved on January 22, 2012 from http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/07/110705071531.htm

Aitchison, J. (1991). Language Change: Progress or Decay? (2nd ed). NY: Cambridge University Press. Aitchison, J. (2001). Language Change: Progress or decay? (3rd ed). NY: Cambridge University Press. (2001).

Beard, A. (2004). Language Change. NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis group.

Cooper, M. & Powell, M. (2009). The New York Times: Politics. Article retrieved on Jan 2, 2012 from http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/17/us/politics/17webplumber.html

Duffy, J. (2003). BBC news: Google calls in the "language police." Article retrieved on January 10, 2012 from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/3006486.stm Finegan, E. & Rickford, J. (2004). Language in the USA: Themes for the Twenty-first Century. NY: Cambridge University Press.

Kulick, D. (1994). Language shift and cultural change. Paper presented at La Trobe University, Australian Linguistic Institute on language maintenance and shift. Victoria, Australia.

Kleinman, Z. (2010). BBC News Technology: How internet is changing language. Retrieved on January 2, 2012 from http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-10971949

Jones, M. & Singh, I. (2005). Exploring Language Change. NY: Routledge. McMahon, A. (1994). Understanding language change. NY: Cambridge University Press.

PBS, (2005). The Truth About Language Change. Article retrieved on January 28, 2012 from http://www.pbs.org/speak/ahead/change/change/

Rowe, B. & Levine, D. (2009). A Concise Introduction to Linguistics (2nd ed). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc. Thomason, S. (n.d). Language Variation and Change. Article retrieved on Feb 1, 2012 from http://lsadc.org/info/ling-fields-change.cfm

Wells, J. (1999). Our Changing Pronunciation. Article retrieved on Feb 1, 2012 from http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/wells/cardiff.htm

Wikipedia (2012). Sound Change. Ariticle retrieved on January 23, 2012 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sound_change Wu, J. & Ben-Canaan,

D. (2006). Impact of globalization and the internet on English language teaching and learning. Article retrieved on Jan 12, 2012 from http://hlju.academia.edu/DanBenCanaan/Papers/107390/The_Impact_of_Globalization_and_

t he_Internet_on_English_Language_Teaching_and_Learning Yoskowitz, A.(2011).
Afterdawn: Oxford Dictionary adds 'LOL,' 'BFF,' other slang. Articlet retrieved on Jan 17,
2012 from
http://www.afterdawn.com/news/article.cfm/2011/03/29/oxford_dictionary_adds_lol_bff_oth
er_slang