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Chapter 10: *Historical Linguistics*

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Key terms: actuation; chain shift; corpora; diachronic; economy; expressiveness; grammaticalisation; lenition; lexicalisation; linguistic reconstruction; primary data; propagation; secondary data; synchronic

Preview: This chapter explains the insights and techniques of historical linguistics, the study of how language changes over time. We begin with a brief explanation of the value of historical linguistics before going on in 10.2 to describe the background to its development. In 10.3 we examine some key explanations for why languages change over time. In so doing we discuss how changes come about and how they then spread throughout speech communities. Following this, we describe some of the types of change that languages go through. Here we focus particularly on change at the levels of phonology, grammar, lexis and semantics. We give examples of changes that have occurred at these levels of language and describe some influential theories that have sought to explain such developments. We then move on in 10.5 to describe some of the main techniques that historical linguists use to study language change. By the end of this chapter you should have a good knowledge of the variety of ways in which languages change, as well as an insight into the methods that linguists use to study such changes.

10.1 Introduction

Primarily, historical linguistics involves describing how and explaining why language changes over time. Much work has focused on sound change, such as the fact that Germanic languages, past and current, have the sound [t] at the beginning of the number ‘two’ (e.g. Gothic *twai*, English *two*, Dutch *twee*, German *zwei* (pronounced [tsvaɪ])), whereas other Indo-European languages past and current typically have [d] (e.g. Latin *duos*, Italian *due*, French *deux*, Spanish *dos*, etc.). But other linguistic areas – grammar, semantics and lexis – have also received significant attention, and most recently areas such as pragmatics have come into focus.

Why bother with historical linguistics? Importantly, it helps explain language that is used today. For example, why is it that when we say the English word *knight* we do not pronounce the <k>? Historical linguistic detective work has been able to establish that the <k> used to be pronounced. But that sound has been subject to a regular process of sound change, mapped out by historical linguists, until it reached the final endpoint of complete loss. Today’s spelling simply retains the <k> as an archaeological relic. Further, differences in accent and dialect can often be accounted for by the fact that change does not proceed at the same pace for all communities of speakers of a language. Additionally, we might note that historical linguistics helps us to read and understand old texts, including literary texts – in English, texts such as *Beowulf* (somewhere between the 11th and 8th centuries), the work of Chaucer (14th century), Shakespeare (c.1600) and Jane Austen (early 19th century).

Most examples in this chapter are English for the obvious reason that they are more accessible to most readers. We will occasionally deploy the conventional labels for particular periods of the development of English, namely, Old English (OE) (700-1100), Middle English (ME) (1100-1500), and Early Modern English (EModE)

(1500-1750). Needless to say, the concepts, processes and factors we discuss in relation to language change are not specific to English.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first is designed to give a sense of some of the theories and ideas that historical linguists have grappled with. The second looks more closely at change at specific linguistic levels. The third discusses data and method, enabling you to conduct your own studies.

Exercise 10.1

Ask a friend who isn't a linguist to explain how they think language has changed within their lifetime. What sort of linguistic changes do they talk about and what does this suggest about the difficulty of studying historical linguistics?

10.2 The historical background to historical linguistics

In its broader definition, historical linguistics encompasses more than the issues outlined in the first sentence of our introductory section. It accounts for any historical aspect of language, including the state of language at a particular moment in past time, as well as change over time. For example, the 'state' of the infinitive form of the verb 'to have' was *habere* in Latin, a language that was thriving as a spoken language 2000 years ago, whilst it is *avere* in modern Italian. The idea of studying the state of the language at a particular moment in time has its roots in an important precursor to historical linguistics, namely, **philology**, the study of historical texts, literary or otherwise. Famous figures who were philologists include J. R. R. Tolkien (of hobbit fame) and Henry Sweet (in part the model for the linguist in George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*). Historical linguistics uses insights from philology but draws primarily on the methods of modern linguistics, of which Ferdinand de Saussure was one of the founders (cf. his *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, published posthumously in 1916).

Saussure proposed a distinction between **synchronic** and **diachronic** linguistics. Essentially, synchronic linguistics studies language at one point in time, and diachronic linguistics studies language over time. Note that synchronic linguistics is not confined to present day language; it can involve any point in time. Historical linguistics has made diachronic linguistics its central concern. However, the two approaches to language are in fact inextricably linked. For example, the fact that in the UK some people might use the term *radio* whilst others use the term *wireless* is a matter of synchronic variation. The fact that in the 20th century *radio* made its way into British English from American English or that we can trace the word back at least as far as Latin *radius*, meaning 'ray', is a diachronic matter. Similarly, the formation of *wireless* through a combination of *wire* and the suffix *-less* is a diachronic matter. Note here that the synchronic account of *radio* and *wireless* makes no mention of the fact that it is on-going change that is driving the variation. There was no variation until *radio* arrived in British English, and now *wireless* is confined to the older generation, itself an indication of change in progress. Observe that the diachronic accounts in the previous two sentences make no connection between *radio* and *wireless*. *Radio* and *wireless* denote the same concept. Languages do not need several words with exactly the same meaning. Instead, one or both words shift their meanings, or one word disappears, as seems to be happening in this case.

The general point is that a full account of what is going on needs both a synchronic and a diachronic perspective. A synchronic snapshot of language at one point in time is often in fact a slice of diachronic change. Saussure was not interested

in the issues we have been outlining in the above paragraph; he was interested in language as an abstract system and not in the variation you get in its realisation, which is more the preserve of sociolinguistics. The relationships between synchronic variation and diachronic change were famously elaborated in Uriel Weinrich, William Labov and Marvin Herzog (1968), and have been developed in the work of William Labov (e.g. 1963, 1978, 1994, 2001).

Some grand theories of change have held sway for decades, even centuries. One such theory relates to **economy**. Here, there is an obvious connection with Darwinism, centred on the idea of the survival of the fittest. In his 1871 book *The Descent of Man*, Darwin draws a parallel between evolutionary biology and language. He approvingly quotes Max Müller's words:

A struggle for life is constantly going on amongst the words and grammatical forms in each language. The better, the shorter, the easier forms are constantly gaining the upper hand, and they owe their success to their own inherent virtue. (p.58)

In fact, it is indeed likely that economy plays some role in language change. **Lenition**, which describes the weakening of sounds such as the [k] of *knight*, is a case in point: less effort is required to produce the newer sound compared with the older. And there are many other examples of reduction (e.g. *God be with you* > *goodbye* > *bye*). However, economy cannot be the single explanation for all language change. It would not account for why [k] is alive and well in many words. Moreover, counter evidence is in the fact that new forms are often not the most economic. For example, compounding is a regular process by which two shorter elements evolve into a longer one (e.g. *green* + *house* > *greenhouse*). Also, with respect to English, consider that many new words were adopted from Latin, and were often less economic (longer and more effortful) than their English counterparts (compare, for example, *urine* and *faeces* with *piss* and *shit*).

For these reasons, modern historical linguistics has been less focused on grand all-encompassing theories as to why language change occurs. Instead, the focus has been on the influence of particular contexts of change, both linguistic and extralinguistic, and often on establishing that change is not random by identifying particular paths of change.

Exercise 10.2

In his *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, Saussure makes the point that diachronic analysis requires initial synchronic analysis but synchronic analysis doesn't require initial diachronic analysis. Why is this?

10.3 Explanations for change: Actuation and propagation

The questions 'how' and 'why' languages change presuppose that they do. Indeed this is the case; only dead languages (e.g. Latin, Sanskrit) do not. Change occurs at all levels of language, though it is not equally observable. Relatively rapid changes in vocabulary are easily observed; relatively slower changes in grammar are less easily observed. It's likely that you saw this in your answer to Exercise 10.1.

How does a change begin? Or, to look at it another way, why do some things change and others don't? And when exactly did the change begin and where? This issue is one of innovation or **actuation**, and it is the site of much controversy. A way

of thinking about language is that it is in a continual state of change yet consists of stepping-stones or states along the way. The first step is that somebody produces a novel form – they innovate. However, it would not be reasonable to describe actuation as all there is to language change. If one person starts using a new word – let’s say ‘pokey-chops’ for people who like trying different foods – would it count as a change? Or is that person simply being creative with language? Shakespeare, for example, is cited in the Oxford English Dictionary as being the only recorded user of over 300 words, including *askance* (as a verb), *unhaired* and *non-come*. For a word or other linguistic item to count as a new form in the language, it needs to be conventionalised to a degree, that is, the new form and its relationships with particular meanings needs to be shared amongst members of a speech community. Language is a matter of shared conventions; it enables people to communicate meanings with, for example, words, even when those words have an arbitrary relation with their meanings. Dark clouds in the sky may non-arbitrarily ‘mean’ rain, as there is a natural physical connection between the two, but there’s an entirely arbitrary relationship between the word *rain* and the wet stuff it denotes (onomatopoeic words such as *buzz* perhaps have a semi-arbitrary relationship with their denotations). So, a full language change can hardly stop at actuation; it must spread across the entire community of users of a particular language, something which is called **propagation** or diffusion. Propagation involves speakers selecting to use somebody else’s linguistic material (including any innovations) themselves. Note here that propagation, the sharing of linguistic conventions, is in itself a mechanism working against change – it is a matter of replication. Language change, then, involves both actuation and propagation. Distinguishing them is tricky, not least because the evidence trail is clearer for propagation than it is for actuation.

10.3.1 Actuation

Explanations for the actuation of change seem to fall roughly into three camps according to the degree of involvement of the speaker in communication.

One set of explanations treats language as an abstract system. A subset of these, in tune with structuralist approaches to language, appeals to **teleological mechanisms**, that is, mechanisms that preserve the internal balance of the linguistic system. One such mechanism is the preservation of uniformity. The process of analogy, or linguistic copying, can help enhance uniformity. For example, today in English the generally uniform means of making a noun plural is to add the <s> inflection. But in Old English that was one of the inflections for one particular set of nouns; other inflections existed for other sets (e.g. the plural of *eyes* was *eyen*). Over time, speakers seem to have extended the <s> plural inflection to all other sets of nouns. Another mechanism is hole-filling (cf. Martinet 1952). Clear examples of this are **chain shifts** in sound systems (see 10.4.1). For example, the vowel of the word *I* used to rhyme with that of *tea*. When it, and many other words with the same vowel, shifted to its current pronunciation, it left a hole in the sound system, and so other adjacent sounds shifted to fill it. We will look further at this moment when we consider the **Great Vowel Shift** in 10.4.1. Yet another mechanism is the avoidance of homonymy – that is, words that share the same spelling and pronunciation but have different meanings (e.g. *left*, meaning either the opposite of right or the past of the verb *leave*) – so that there is a neat one-to-one mapping of meanings and forms. There are particular problems with teleological explanations, including, for example, the fact that cross-linguistic empirical work reveals languages with long-standing gaps, not to

mention the fact that teleological mechanisms are not actually that abstract (we avoid homonymy in order not to be misunderstood). It is also worth observing that the teleological explanation does not ultimately account for change: a perfectly balanced system is one that does not change. Yet languages do change.

Another subset of explanations treating language as a relatively abstract system appeals to child language acquisition. The basic assumption here, in tune with Generative approaches to language, is that an adult's grammar is fixed; changes only occur during the phase of child language acquisition. Regarding change, the idea is that there is not necessarily a straightforward transmission of the grammatical system from one generation to another. Children sometimes get the wrong end of the grammatical stick, which can lead to them changing a grammatical parameter. When this happens, there is abrupt and radical change to the abstract grammatical system. This account, however, has a number of problems. For example, the idea that grammatical change is restricted to the phase when a child acquires language is controversial (sociolinguistic studies, such as Labov 1994, have shown actualisations amongst adults). It is also not clear why children sometimes suddenly act in unison to create an abrupt change in the language system, whereas at other times they do not. The most famous application of the child-based approach to matters of language change is Lightfoot's (e.g. 1979) account of the modal verbs in English. Lightfoot's account runs thus: the core modal verbs (*will, shall, may, can, must*) were very different in Old English, failing to exhibit many of the characteristics they have today (e.g. they could not act as auxiliary verbs, they could express tense); but in the 16th century they underwent abrupt change, becoming like the auxiliary modal verbs we know today; more precisely, they underwent **reanalysis**, that is to say, the surface form remained the same, but their underlying grammatical category changed (e.g. full verb to auxiliary verb). There has been, however, considerable criticism of this account, including empirical work showing that already in Old English these verbs did not quite behave as full lexical verbs, and that there was no abrupt change (see, for example, Fischer 2003).

The remaining two actuation explanation camps have in common the fact that they assume the site of change to be the context of communication: i.e. the context in which a speaker produces an utterance which is understood by a hearer. Where they differ is in the degree of intentionality or consciousness involved in producing the actuation. An area at the more intentional end of the scale involves increased **expressiveness** or creativity. Using the words *bad* or *wicked* to mean 'good' are examples of expressiveness. Expressiveness, however, is partly constrained by the desire for clarity, the desire to avoid being misunderstood. Less intentional is economy. Economy can be seen in terms of physical effort, but also in terms of achieving one's goal in the least amount of time possible. It is often mentioned in relation to elliptical or eroded forms. To return to an example from 10.2, the fact that Latin *habere* ('to have') has evolved into modern Italian *avere* involves a process of lenition (see Honeybone 2008) in which the plosive [b] weakens to fricative [v]. The final step in this path of change is complete loss. This has happened to the initial [h] of *habere*; this is already a weak sound which simply weakened to nothing.

The final actuation explanation camp involves little intentionality. Ohala (1981), for example, suggested that people misperceive sounds and then reproduce those sounds in their speech. Note, however, that Ohala was thinking about pronunciation, and there is much variability in the production of sounds, especially

vowels, and hence greater potential for error than in other areas of the language system.

10.3.2 Propagation

Change is never fully predictable (though one can state what is probable). An actuation need not propagate; it can fizzle out. For example, one of the last words recorded in the 1989 second edition of the Oxford English dictionary is *hoolivan*. This is created by a blend of *hooligan* and *van*, and denotes the van with which the police force collected up hooligans. The dictionary makers clearly thought that this lexical item would become established – that it would propagate across the bulk of the English-speaking community, but it fizzled out almost immediately. Note the implications of this: if a particular change does not work its way across all relevant items, we are left with irregularities. For example, today the inflection <s> in English marks plurality, but not quite for all nouns. Nouns such as *oxen*, *deer* and *geese* deploy alternative ways of marking plurality, ways which once used to apply to many more nouns (recollect the earlier example of *eyen*, to which we could add many others like *shoen* or *treen*).

The causes of propagation – the factors that favour a particular form being adopted by members of a speech community – are social. People select particular variants in order to achieve particular social aims. One factor involves acts of identity: using language to identify with, or conversely distance oneself from, a particular social group (cf. LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985). Those acts of identity often involve prestige, another important factor (cf. Labov [2006] 1966). Prestigious forms are often associated with people in dominant, high-ranking social groups, and conversely stigmatised forms are often associated with people in low-ranking social groups. Social aspirers emulate those groups, and thus those prestigious forms trickle down the social hierarchy. This is what Labov (1966) refers to as change from above. Here, this means ‘above the level of consciousness’; people knowingly select a prestigious variant (or avoid the stigmatised variant). In the development of standard British English, for example, the prestigious variants of dominant social groups played a key role (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2003). There were some exceptions, however. The eventual rise of the present tense singular verb inflection –s (e.g. *he talks*) was fuelled by the mass of the population, especially in London, using it without any kind of conscious emulation of prestige (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2003). This is what Labov (1966) refers to as change from below (i.e. ‘below the level of consciousness’). It is not, however, always the case that the most prestigious forms are associated with the dominant social groups. Labov (1963) introduced the idea of covert prestige, referring to cases where speakers choose non-standard forms that have prestige in specific contexts. Sometimes speakers wish to identify with the regional or the local social group, even if it may not have broader social prestige. It is worth noting that the notion of prestige need not apply simply to prestige variants within a language. Speakers are likely to imitate prestige languages. Classical Latin and Greek have been hugely influential on many modern European languages for exactly this reason.

Propagation does not happen without contact. A hermit is not going to propagate! Let us first consider contact between people speaking the same language. What is important here is how people organise themselves in social networks. People who talk to one another tend to talk like one another: they accommodate to each other’s speech habits. So, people who just talk to the same people again and again, as

for example in isolated communities, are not going to come into contact with new forms but simply replicate the old ones. Conversely, those who talk to a variety of people are more likely to come into contact with new forms and adopt them. The difference is between social networks with fewer and stronger links and social networks with more and weaker links (cf. Milroy and Milroy 1985). The consequences of this can be seen in the development of accents and dialects in the British Isles. Urbanisation has created large cities, most notably London, which comprise social networks with numerous weak links. It is no surprise then that in the melting pot of London changes progress rapidly across the region, whereas in areas more remote from London with sparser populations much older features can still be found (in Scottish English the pronunciation of *house* as /hus/).

Social networks can operate on a larger scale. Invasion, migration and settlement can lead to contact with new language communities, as well as the loss of contact with old ones. Sometimes the speaker and hearer are not using the same language. For instance, as a result of the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin between the 9th and 10th centuries, the Hungarian language came into close contact with other speech communities. This facilitated the borrowing of words from the languages of these neighbouring communities, which included Slavic, Romanian and Turkic. Contact with communities speaking different languages is an important part of the history of English. Trudgill (1989) suggests that a high number of adults acquiring a second language in a contact situation is a cause of simplification. This factor is one of the classic explanations for the simplification of the inflectional complexity English used to have, notably with the arrival, starting in the late 8th century, of the Norse-speaking Viking invaders and later the Norman French following the conquest of 1066 (though it should be noted that simplification for one speech community may not be recognised as such by another, and the more neutral term regularisation may be more appropriate). The borrowing of words is a typical feature of contact situations, especially when one of the languages has prestige. This is most obviously the case for French loanwords in English.

Issues of prestige and contact often overlap with issues of power. Prestige languages and dialects can be imposed by those in power. Power can bring about conquest: effectively, enforced contact, as happened in Britain with the Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Viking and Norman conquests. The language of the dominant invader can gain prestige, as happened notably with Latin and French. An interesting converse example concerns the Celtic languages (e.g. Welsh) of Ancient Britain. The Anglo-Saxons settled in Britain in various waves, mostly in the centuries around the 6th century, and brought with them the Germanic dialects that formed the foundation for English. However, Celtic languages made very little impact on English, especially with respect to vocabulary, possibly because they had little prestige (recently, scholars, such as Juhani Klemola or Peter Schrijver, have argued for greater impact in areas of phonology and grammar than hitherto acknowledged). Prescriptive rules, which are coined by authorities, self-appointed individuals (e.g. the 18th century English grammarian Robert Lowth) or institutions (e.g. language Academies, educational bodies) often gain prestige, and may well be followed by certain social groups. For example, from EModE onwards the English increasingly avoided multiple negation, a change which seems to have been led by the professional ranks, gentry and royal court (cf. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2003). (It is possible that some prescriptive rules partly reflect aspects of contemporary usage; it might be that

descriptive norms of usage feed prescriptive stipulations, which in turn feed descriptive norms, and so on).

Finally, we briefly note the development of communication technologies to facilitate contact. With respect to English, William Caxton's establishment of a printing press near Westminster in 1476 marks the beginning of printing in England. Printing increased opportunities for communication, of bringing many people into contact with one form of a text, and thereby helping facilitate the standardisation of English. The development of transport networks (e.g. tarmac roads, railways) can facilitate contact. More recently, the telegraph and the telephone have offered further opportunities for communication. The advent of the radio broadcasting in the UK (the first BBC broadcast was in 1922) is credited with fuelling the establishment of Received Pronunciation, a prestigious social dialect that is not regionally marked. We should also mention the advent of television and also satellite communications. These later developments have been credited with fuelling the Americanisation of British English.

KEY POINTS: Explanations for change

- ☐ Actuation refers to the initiation of linguistic change through the production of a novel form.
- ☐ Important mechanisms of actuation include analogy, hole-filling, reanalysis, misperception, economy and expressiveness.
- ☐ For a linguistic innovation to become part of the language of a community it needs to be selected by other speakers and thus propagated.
- ☐ Through propagation linguistic innovations come to be shared by a majority of the speech community and thus become conventionalised.
- ☐ Propagation requires contact between speakers.
- ☐ Propagation can result if speakers choose to emulate a form that they believe to be high-status in social terms. This is what William Labov calls 'change from above'.
- ☐ Alternatively, a form may be propagated simply by a significant mass of speakers choosing to use it. This is what Labov calls 'change from below'.
- ☐ Prestige is an important propellant of propagation, whilst communication technologies are important facilitators.

Exercise 10.3

- (a) Have a guess as to how the word *outrage* came about. Now go to a dictionary with historical information, such as the Oxford English Dictionary, and discover what type of language change this is.
- (b) Write down some examples of new language features which seem to be driven by expressiveness.
- (c) Investigate the effect of contact with speakers of other languages on regional dialects. In the case of Britain, investigate northern dialects in the light of the fact that the Norse-speaking Vikings only settled in the Northern and Eastern areas of Britain. Write down some Northern dialectal words, and then investigate their heritage (note down similar cognate forms) (an obvious resource to use is the Oxford English Dictionary).

10.4 Types of linguistic change

In this section we examine change at specific linguistic levels, paying particular attention to phonology, grammar, lexis and semantics, as it is here where most work has focussed. Change, needless to say, can occur in any area of language.

10.4.1 Phonological change

Phonological changes rarely happen in isolation. A change in one part of the sound system of a language is likely to affect other sounds too, and a change in the phonology of one language can affect the phonology of a neighbouring language.

In 1822, Jacob Grimm (one half of the Brothers Grimm, of fairy tale fame) published a systematic account of a phonological change in Germanic, an ancestor of modern languages such as English, German, Dutch, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian. This phonological change explains why Germanic became distinct from the other branches of the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) language, such as Italic and Celtic. According to Grimm, at some unknown point in the past, the consonants of Germanic shifted. That is, they began to be pronounced differently to the consonants in PIE. For example, PIE [bh] (an aspirated voiced stop) started to be pronounced in Germanic as [b] (an unaspirated voiced stop). PIE [b] shifted in Germanic to a [p] (a voiceless stop). And PIE [p] shifted in Germanic to [f] (a fricative). Grimm's description of this process has become known as Grimm's Law and explains why, for example, the word for 'foot' in Latin and Greek begins with a [p] (*pod-* and *ped-*, respectively) while in English and German it begins with a [f] (*foot* and *fuss*). (Grimm also accounts for the examples given in the first paragraph of section 10.1).

Grimm's Law is an example of what historical linguists call a chain shift, a teleological mechanism of language change. This model imagines the phonemes of a language to be like links in a chain. Because they are connected, moving one link of the chain inevitably means that the others move too. That is, if the pronunciation of one phoneme changes, then others will also change. Theoretically there are two types of chain shift (i.e. two variants of the model). These are drag chains (also known as pull chains) and push chains. The idea behind the drag chain model is that when the pronunciation of one phoneme changes (i.e. when it moves position in the chain), it 'drags' the other phonemes with it. In effect, one phoneme fills the hole left by the movement of another, and so on. The push chain model suggests the opposite, i.e. that one phoneme moves into the 'slot' already occupied by another, causing that phoneme to be pushed into another slot in order to avoid merging with the new phoneme. The idea of drag chains and push chains was originally proposed by Martinet (1955). Many historical linguists prefer the drag chain model because of a theoretical problem with the notion of a push chain. Remember that the idea behind a push chain is that phonemes are pushed out of their existing position into a new one in order to prevent them merging phonemically with the phoneme that has moved into their slot. While it may be possible for two vowel sounds to occupy the same position while one is in the process of moving, Aitchison (2001: 190) makes the point that it is harder to envisage this happening with consonant sounds. For these reasons, the drag chain model is often seen as a more plausible description of sound changes in language. Applying this to Grimm's description of the movement of consonants in Germanic, it is likely that one consonant dragged the others in its wake. In practice, however, phonemic mergers do happen in language (e.g. in many varieties of English the first sound of *which* is now indistinguishable from *witch*, but once they used to be distinct). Aitchison (2001) also discusses cases where a sound change might involve both a drag and a push chain.

Phonological changes in a language can offer insights into why other levels of language are as they are. For example, the sound change in English known as the Great Vowel Shift (GVS) helps to explain why the pronunciation of English words often seems at odds with their spelling. Why, for instance, is the present day English word *tide* pronounced [taɪd] and not [ti:də]? Why should *name* be pronounced [neɪm] and not [na:mə]? The answer is that at some point in the fifteenth century, the way in which people pronounced the long vowels began to change. This change took place over a long period of time (approximately 1400 to 1650) and the end result was that the pronunciation of the long vowels was raised. Raising refers to the height in the mouth at which your tongue is when you produce a particular vowel sound (this affects the size of the resonating cavity which then impacts on the sound that is produced). As an example, during the period of the GVS the pronunciation of [a:] was raised so that by the Early Modern English period it sounded more like [ɛ:]. (If you pronounce the two sounds, you should feel that your tongue is closer to the roof of your mouth for [ɛ:] than it is for [a:]). Over time, [ɛ:] was also raised, eventually becoming a diphthong [eɪ], hence the present day English pronunciation [neɪm].

During the GVS, each of the seven long vowels shifted to take the position of the one immediately above it in height. When it came to the highest vowels, [i:] and [u:], since these had no higher place to move to, they developed into diphthongs. The long vowels, and the changes that they underwent during the GVS, are outlined in Table 10.1:

Middle English →	Early Modern English →	Present Day English →	Examples
[a:]	[ɛ:]	[eɪ]	[na:mə] → [nɛ:m] → [neɪm] <i>name</i>
[ɛ:]	[e:]	[i:]	[mɛ:t] → [me:t] → [mi:t] <i>meat</i>
[e:]	[i:]	[i:]	[fe:t] → [fi:t] <i>feet</i>
[i:]	[əɪ]	[aɪ]	[ti:də] → [təɪd] → [taɪd] <i>tide</i>
[ɔ:]	[o:]	[əʊ]	[rɔ:b] → [ro:b] → [rəʊb] <i>robe</i>
[o:]	[u:]	[u:]	[go:s] → [gu:s] <i>goose</i>
[u:]	[aʊ]	[aʊ]	[hu:s] → [haʊs] <i>house</i>

Table 10.1 Raising of the long vowels during the Great Vowel Shift

The GVS took place over a long period of time. During this period, English spelling became standardised as a result of a number of factors, including the impact of William Caxton's printing press (see section 10.3.2). However, the phonological developments of the GVS continued until at least the mid-seventeenth century (and arguably continue today), long after standardised spelling had become widely accepted. This meant that the new standard spellings often preserved much earlier pronunciations, hence *name* reflecting the older pronunciation [na:mə]. Had spelling been standardised *after* the GVS, we might have expected a spelling that reflected the modern pronunciation – perhaps *neim*.

The motivation for phonological change in language is complex and encompasses both language-internal (e.g. teleological mechanisms in actuation) and

language-external factors (e.g. propagation, contact, prestige, power). The chain shift model describes the former. For the latter we need to look to sociolinguistic explanations. Romaine (1982: 122-3) extends, perhaps controversially, the **Uniformitarian Principle** (the assumption that the general properties of language have been the same throughout history) to encompass sociolinguistic practices. In this respect, just as there are prestige varieties of language today, so too must there have been prestige varieties in the past. Assuming this to be the case, it is reasonable to suppose that the actuation of the GVS may have been the aspiration on the part of the merchant classes in London to emulate what they considered to be more prestigious sociolects (see Labov 1978).

10.4.2 Grammatical change

Old English was a synthetic language, in which word order was much less constrained than it is in Present Day English. Grammatical function was marked instead by a system of inflections (more like Latin or Modern German). This inflectional system gradually broke down as a result of numerous factors, including phonological change in OE that resulted in inflections becoming unstressed, and language contact with Scandinavian settlers. By the Middle English period OE had developed from being a largely synthetic (i.e. inflectional) language to an analytic one (i.e. one in which grammatical function was indicated through syntactic structure rather than inflections). This development is an example of grammatical change. For example, nouns in Old English not only varied according to **number** (e.g. singular, plural), but also **case**. Compare these two sentences: *The hunter saw the deer* and *The deer saw the hunter*. We know that in the first sentence the hunter is the subject doing the seeing, whereas in the second the hunter is the object being seen because of word-order – where they are positioned in the sentence. The unmarked order of sentence elements today is subject-verb-object (**SVO**). In Old English, the nominative case was used for subject functions (thus *hunta*), and the accusative for object functions (thus *huntan*). Note that if words themselves are thus marked by inflections, one can move them to various positions in the sentence yet still know whether they are the subject or object.

Much recent work has focussed on **grammaticalisation**. Antoine Meillet (1912: 132) defined grammaticalisation as ‘the attribution of a grammatical character to a formerly independent word’. Grammaticalisation is the gradual process whereby linguistic items, typically contentful lexical items, become more grammatical, and as they do so undergo other linguistic changes. Hopper and Traugott (2003: 7) proposed a particular grammaticalisation cline or path of change (finer gradations are possible within these steps):

content word → grammatical word → clitic → inflectional affix

Figure 10.1 Cline of grammaticalisation

An important point about the cline is the unidirectional hypothesis – the hypothesis that change develops in the direction of being more grammatical not less. We have already encountered an example of the first stage, when we noted the core modals (e.g. *shall*, *will*, *may*) in English shifting from full lexical verbs to auxiliary verbs. The modals also illustrate some of the associated linguistic changes involved in

grammaticalisation:

- *Reduction in syntactic freedom*. Modals, as auxiliary verbs have less freedom than full lexical verbs. Consider that one can say *Go!* and still form a sentence, but *Shall!* does not. Auxiliary verbs, by definition, work with lexical verbs.
- *Semantic bleaching*. For example, the original sense of *shall* in Old English was obligation (a sense that lingers in relics such as ‘thou shalt not commit adultery’). But that original sense has been bleached out of most current usages, such as ‘we shall finish this chapter soon’, which have much more to do with marking the future. In fact, it is not the case that semantic meaning is bleached out to leave nothing, but rather that there is a shift from more concrete meanings to more abstract.
- *Phonological reduction*. In speech, *shall* is almost always reduced to the clitic *’ll*, as in ‘we’ll finish this chapter soon’. (Note that *’ll* has even less syntactic freedom, as it cannot stand on its own).

Perhaps grammaticalisation sounds like a fairly obscure process. In fact, it encompasses a large range of features. Here are some rapid examples: the intensifying adverb *very* evolves from an adjective with the sense of ‘truly’ or ‘really’; the indefinite article *a/an* evolves from the numeral adjective *one* with the sense of a single thing; the negative form *not* evolves from the negative form *ne* plus the noun *aught* meaning ‘anything’, giving *naught*, i.e. ‘not anything’ (*nowt* and *aught* can still be heard in Northern English).

10.4.3 Lexical change

Lexical change encompasses the expansion of a language’s vocabulary and the development of its constituent words. There are a number of ways in which vocabularies can be developed. New words can be borrowed from other languages, consequently having the status of **loans**. Examples include *weekend* and *computer*, borrowed from English into French, *Allee* (‘avenue’) and *Beton* (‘cement’) borrowed from French into German, and *kindergarten* and *sauerkraut* borrowed from German into English. And it is not simply words that can be borrowed. Loans into English include inflections (e.g. French plural *aux*, as in *gateaux*), prefixes (e.g. German *über*), suffixes (e.g. French *ette*, as in *cigarette*), phrases (e.g. Latin *summa cum laude*, particularly in American English), acronyms (e.g. French *RSVP*) and even whole sentences (e.g. French *C’est la vie!*). Some loans are borrowed without change, as in the above examples, and some are adapted (e.g. *music* from French *musique*). This process of adaptation can sometimes involve transliterating a word or expression into the target language. The resulting lexeme is known as a calque. For example, Spanish *tarjeta de crédito* is a calque of English *credit card*, while *long time no see* is an English calque from Cantonese. Motivations for borrowing were discussed at the end of section 10.3.2.

In addition to simply borrowing words, the vocabulary of a language can be expanded through a number of internal word-formation processes. These include:

Acronymisation

The formation of a word from the initial letters of some or all of the words in a given phrase. E.g. *ET* (Extra Terrestrial), *KANUKOKA* (Kalaallisut *Kalaallit Nunaanni Kommunit Kattuffiannit* = Greenlandic Communities Association), *RSVP* (French

Répondez s'il vous plaît), *SNCF* (French *Société nationale des chemins de fer français* = French National Railways Society). Some acronyms are so commonly used that many speakers fail to recognise them as such. Examples include *laser* (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation) and *scuba* (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus).

Back-formation

The formation of a word by the removal of an affix from an existing word. E.g. *choreograph* < *choreography*, *euthanize* < *euthanasia*, *edit* < *editor*, *enthuse* < *enthusiasm*. Note that back-formation usually involves changing the part-of-speech of the original word (in all of the particular examples given the change is from noun to verb).

Blending

The process of taking elements from two existing words to form a new one. E.g. *genome* (gene + chromosome), *pixel* (picture + element), *wifi* (wireless + fidelity), Spanish *cantautor* (*cantante* [singer] + *autor* [author] = singer-songwriter), Swedish *Hemester* (*hem* [home] + *semester* [holiday] = staycation), and Danish *mokost* (*morgenmad* [breakfast] + *frokost* [lunch] = brunch).

Clipping

The removal of syllables from a polysyllabic word to create a new one. While similar in essence to back-formation, clipped words (clips) do not differ in part-of-speech from their original form. E.g. *bus* (*omnibus*), *doc* (*doctor*), *exam* (*examination*), *flu* (*influenza*), *pub* (*public house*).

Coinage

Coinages are invented words with no etymology, and are thus extremely rare. Examples are often product names, such as *Teflon* and *Xerox*.

Conversion

The practice of using an existing word as a different part-of-speech. E.g. *ask* and *blog* (originally nouns) as verbs. Conversion is common in analytic languages and is sometimes referred to as zero derivation. In synthetic languages, conversion is not possible, since indicating a change of word class involves the addition of inflections.

Derivation

The formation of a new word through the addition of derivational morphemes, or affixes, to an existing word. E.g. *im* + *possible* = *impossible*, *hope* + *less* = *hopeless*, *impressive* + *ly* = *impressively*. Derivational morphemes differ from inflectional morphemes in that the former generate new words while the latter simply generate grammatical variants of the same word (for example, plural forms of a noun, past tense forms of a main verb).

Compounding

Combining words (free morphemes) to form another word. Note that this is not the same as blending, which does not combine the entire words at the outset. E.g. *headhunter* (noun-noun compound), *greenhouse* (adjective-noun compound),

spoonfeed (noun-verb compound). Over time compounds can lose materials as they coalesce (e.g. *goodbye* began as a compound of ‘god be with you (ye)’).

Brinton and Traugott (2005) argue the process of **lexicalisation** is a common feature of language change. We have already seen that grammaticalisation is the process by which a lexical item takes on a grammatical function (for example, the negative clitic *n’t* – as in *haven’t* – is a grammaticalisation of *not*). Lexicalisation describes the process by which a meaning comes to be realised in a single word or morpheme rather than in a grammatical construction. For example, the word *cupboard* was originally a noun phrase (*cup board*), meaning ‘a board on which to place cups’. However, by the 16th century, the [p] of *cup* had assimilated to the [b] of *board*, and *board* had lost its full stress (evidence for this can be seen in 17th century spellings such as *cubbard* and *cubbert*). As a result of these changes, today’s English speakers no longer understand the meaning of the word as being a compound of *cup* and *board* (compare, for example, *ironing board*); *cupboard* has become lexicalised. Other examples of lexicalisation in English include *holiday*, *about*, *bridegroom*, *husband*, *goodbye* and many more. The process can also be observed in many other languages. In Hungarian, for instance, the greeting *csókolom* (‘I kiss your hand’) is arguably lexicalised. Coalescence of form and idiomatization of meaning are typical of lexicalization. For example, OE *god* (‘god’) has fused with *sib(b)* (‘relation’) to give *gossip*, which has a meaning that is not predictable – it is idiomatic. Lexical developments in language are inextricably linked to semantic change, which we turn to next.

10.4.4 Semantic change

Semantic change refers to the changes in meaning over time. Historical linguists are interested in two main questions here: what types of semantic change occur and why?

To begin with the first issue, a number of different types of semantic change have been identified. Two basic categories of semantic change are broadening and narrowing. Broadening describes the process by which the meaning of a word becomes more general than it originally was. For example, the word *dial* was originally a noun derived from Latin *diale* and described a flat disc engraved with units of measurement (as in a sundial). When the telephone was invented, *dial* broadened in usage to become a noun to describe the moveable disc on the face of a telephone and a verb to describe the action of using the dial to call up a number. With the advent of mobile technology, *dial* underwent a further broadening so that it could now be used to describe the action of typing a number into a mobile phone keypad.

Narrowing describes the opposite process, by which the meaning of a word becomes more specific than it originally was. The noun *to starve*, meaning ‘to die or to suffer severely from a lack of food’, had a much more general meaning in OE, where *steorfan* meant simply to die.

In addition to these two superordinate categories, we can identify a number of other types of semantic change. Amelioration is the process of meaning becoming more positive over time, as has happened with the words *nice* and *pretty*, which originally meant ‘foolish’ and ‘sly’, respectively. Pejoration, on the other hand, refers to meaning becoming less positive over time. *Bully*, for instance, was originally a term of endearment and familiarity, only acquiring its negative meaning in the 17th century. Hungarian *jobbágy* originally meant ‘soldier’ before acquiring the more pejorative meaning of ‘peasant’. These processes are ongoing all the time. The

meaning of *criticise*, for example, is arguably becoming more pejorative over time, moving from simply meaning ‘to appraise something’ to its more common sense now of negative appraisal.

Weakening is another common process of semantic change and involves meanings becoming weaker over time. For example, *blitz*, a clipping of *blitzkrieg*, was borrowed from German into English during the Second World War to describe a violent air attack. Over time its meaning has weakened so that it is now often used fairly trivially to describe intense campaigns generally, such as ‘a blitz on benefits cheats’. In this particular case, the original meaning of *blitz* has not been lost completely from English. This can sometimes happen, as in the case of *slip* as an intransitive verb, which used to mean ‘to escape’ (note that this meaning is still preserved in the expression ‘to give someone the slip’). Weakening may be seen as a type of semantic shift, in which some aspect of the original meaning of a word is lost whilst a related meaning develops.

Another common tendency in the process of semantic change is for words to become metaphorised over time. For example, the meaning of the verb *starve* (see above) has not only narrowed over time but has become metaphorised too (for example, to be starved of affection). It goes without saying that the same processes can be observed in all languages. For example, the meaning of Hungarian *fejvadász* (‘headhunter’) is, like its English, German and doubtless other counterparts, now primarily metaphorical to refer to someone who directly approaches a senior executive with a job offer.

It is relatively straightforward to identify trends in semantic change. It is much harder to determine the causes of semantic development. Blank (1999) suggests a variety of potential motivations. Perhaps the most obvious of these is when a new concept in the world calls for a new word, such as *blog* or *wifi*. Indeed, sociocultural changes generally can drive semantic development, as in the case of OE *haligdæg* (‘holy’ + ‘day’ → ‘holiday’) broadening to mean a period of leave from work, rather than a religious festival specifically, a change that parallels the secularization of society. Close conceptual relations can also facilitate semantic change, as when *infer* is used to mean *imply*, or *affect* to mean *effect*. These are the kinds of changes that prescriptivists often rail against. Blank (1999) also notes that emotionally marked concepts can be drivers of semantic change, as speakers seek euphemisms to avoid embarrassment; hence, *throne* to refer to *lavatory* and *take a leak* to refer to urinating. Blank (1999) describes the overarching motivation of his typology for semantic change as a search for increased efficiency and expressivity (cf. the discussion of economy and expressivity in section 10.3.1).

Recent work on semantic change, especially by Traugott (e.g. 1989, 1995), has been focused on the idea that semantic change normally proceeds in the direction of increased subjectivity, that is, expressions of the speaker’s attitudes and evaluations. Traugott (1989) identified three general tendencies or paths of semantic change. We give these below in a simplified form. The first is reminiscent of our discussion of grammaticalisation above.

- *Towards more abstract meanings* e.g. the word *bureau* changed from something physical, something tangible (a cloth), to something which is abstract and untouchable (an agency).

- *Towards more textual meanings* e.g. the word *and* originally meant ‘in the presence of’ (a spatial preposition), but it is now used to join two bits of discourse (it is now primarily a conjunction).
- *Towards more attitudinal meanings* e.g. the word *well* has changed from meaning a positive state (e.g. good fortune, health), which it can still do today, to also being able to mark the speaker’s attitudes and beliefs about something, as when one says ‘Well I never!’.

Of these tendencies, Traugott views the third as the most important. It is the one that encapsulates **subjectification**: the ‘development of a grammatically identifiable expression of speaker belief or speaker attitude to what is said’ (Traugott 1995: 32). Most recently, scholars, including Traugott, have been turning to the notion of **intersubjectivity**, a further stage of development by which subjectified items take on meanings which encode attitudes towards the addressee. One can see something of this with the item *well*, which can display reluctance to the addressee to say something negative, as in “It was a bit ... well ... tasteless”.

KEY POINTS: Types of change

- Change can occur at any level of language.
- Phonological change is often described using the chain shift model, which imagines linguistic elements (typically phonemes) to be like links in a chain. If one link changes position, the others do too.
- There are two variants of the chain shift model: drag chains and push chains. In the former, the movement of the target phoneme drags the others in its wake. In the latter, the target phoneme moves into an already occupied slot, pushing that phoneme to a different position.
- A key theory of grammatical change is grammaticalisation, a gradual process whereby an item becomes more grammatical in character.
- A key theory of lexical change is lexicalisation, a gradual process whereby an item becomes more lexical in character.
- A key theory of semantic change is subjectification, a gradual process whereby the meanings of an item become more attitudinal in character.

Exercise 10.4

(a) Grammatical change

Why might the expression *gonna*, as in for example ‘I’m gonna switch the light off’, have anything to do with grammaticalization?

(b) Lexical change: borrowing

What motivates the borrowing of lexical items from other languages? And in what ways is the term *borrowing* an inaccurate description of the process? Can you think of a better term?

(c) Lexical change: word formation

Here are some words first recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* between 2000 and 2013. Choose the word formation process (or processes) that best explains how it was created (it may help to look the words up in a dictionary first).

- i. defriend (*verb*, 2005)

- ii. goji (*noun*, 2002)
- iii. goldendoodle (*noun*, 2001)
- iv. iPod (*noun*, 2001)
- v. metabolomic (*adjective*, 2001)
- vi. SARS (*noun*, 2003)
- vii. Sudoku (*noun*, 2000)
- viii. waterboarding (*noun*, 2004)

(d) Semantic change

King James II, upon seeing Sir Christopher Wren's St. Paul's Cathedral, described it as 'amusing, awful and artificial', by which he meant it was wonderful. Describe the shifts in meaning these three words have undergone.

10.5 Data and method

How do you investigate linguistic change over time? Historical linguists use a combination of **primary data** (records of actual language use), **secondary data** (commentaries on language use) and **linguistic reconstruction**.

With regard to primary data, two important caveats need to be borne in mind. First, historical texts were usually repeatedly published over the years, often without the original publication date, thus giving the impression that they are not as old as they are in fact are. Moreover, editors, especially in the 19th century, often republished historical texts with the original publication date, but also with editorial interference. Some editors were better than others, but there was often the urge to tidy up the original, to get rid of that nasty variation. However, it is often that very variation that is of interest to the historical linguist.

The second caveat relates to genre. Historically important genres include religious texts (e.g. the Bible), legal texts (e.g. laws, courtroom proceedings), literary texts, scholarly writings (notably histories), scientific writing and correspondence (both personal and official). These are important because they span centuries, are present in several languages and survive in reasonable quantities. Tracking linguistic change within genres is the basis for much more solid conclusions than change across genres and time. Comparing a legal text from 1600 with an email from 2000 confuses two variables, time and genre. One of the genres that has a remarkably good survival rate across time and languages is religious language, specifically, the Bible (see, for example, Görlach 1997). However, to analyse what is happening across multiple genres, we need to use **corpora** (singular corpus). Broadly speaking, a corpus is a large body of texts in electronic form, often designed to represent particular genres and periods (for an excellent list of historical corpora, see: <http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/CoRD/corpora/index.html>). With a computer, one can investigate linguistic features in corpus, including its frequencies in the categories of a corpus, and thus, assuming those categories pertain to different periods, over time. But there are caveats. Spelling variation can be a problem (e.g. searching for *sweet* would not retrieve instances of *sweete*, *svveet*, etc.). Searching for a grammatical feature or an aspect of word-meaning is even harder, and arriving at frequencies of occurrence is not the endpoint, as we must examine the function in context of whatever linguistic feature we are searching for. Also, absence of occurrence is not a guarantee that an item is completely obsolete. The problem could be with the corpus not happening to contain that item. With respect to this point, we should remember that historical records, beyond relatively recent times, are written records – they do not record what was happening in everyday speech. Some linguists argue that spoken

interaction is the powerhouse of linguistic change. Indeed, the bulk of communication takes place in speech, and speech is learnt before reading/writing – it is primary in various senses. For early periods of language use, historical linguists are forced to look for clues in speech-based genres such as trial proceedings and plays, or in secondary data.

Secondary data include works like dictionaries, grammars, and commentaries on pronunciation, elocution, spelling and correctness of use. Sometimes secondary data reveal as much about attitudes towards language as the language itself. For example, William Bullokar's *Pamphlet for Grammar* (1586) reveals how early grammarians were in the thrall of Latin, and so attempted to see other languages, even those with markedly different grammatical systems, through the prism of Latin. For instance, the early English grammarians typically distinguished grammatical gender in nouns and adjectives. This is nonsense from today's perspective, as we know from primary data that the situation was more or less the same then as it is now.

What happens when we have no suitable primary or secondary data? In such instances, linguistic reconstruction must fill the gaps. This is essentially calculated guesswork made on the basis of indirect evidence. In the case of sound change, for example, the indirect evidence sources are as follows:

Spelling

Not all languages involve systematic correspondences between phonemes and graphemes but some do. Moreover, the fact that older stages of spelling were less standardised means that spelling systems were more likely to reflect people's pronunciation. Thus, regarding the word *nut*, the presence of initial <h> in some varieties of OE (thus *hnutu*) gives us a clue that the word originally had an initial sound approximating to [h], and regarding the word *was*, the presence of <æ> in some varieties of OE (thus *wæs*) gives us a clue that the vowel quality approximated to [æ].

Rhymes and rhyming dictionaries

The following rhyming couplet offers evidence for the shift in English from [æ] to [ʊ] in words such as *was* and *Swan*.

Then, as her Strength with Years increas'd, began
To pierce aloft in Air the soaring Swan:

(Dryden, *Aeneis* 1697)

The fact that *Swan* rhymes with *began* seems to be good evidence for the fact that in this period it was still [æ]. Of course, this evidence only works if one can be sure about the pronunciation of one half of the rhyme (in this case *began*), and we need to establish how accurate the poet's rhyming technique is (e.g. watch out for eye-rhymes).

Puns

The following pun offers evidence for the shift in English from [i:] to [aɪ], a shift that falls under the umbrella of the Great Vowel Shift:

Pro. But what said she?
Sp. I.

Pro. Nod-I, why that's noddy.
Sp. You mistooke Sir: I say she did nod;
And you aske me if she did nod, and I say I.
Pro. And that set together is noddy.

(Shakespeare, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, act 1, scene I, First Folio 1623)

The pun exploits the fact that the letter *I* could either represent the first person pronoun or could represent an affirmative 'aye' (i.e. roughly today's 'yes'). Today, of course, *I* and 'aye' sound the same. Speed's answer to Protheus's question is that she gave the affirmative 'aye' (it is written *I*, but Speed clarifies 'she did nod', so the sense is most likely 'aye' not *I*). Protheus then wittily draws out the fact that Speed has presumably nodded as he said 'aye', and a nod plus 'aye' sounds the same as the word *noddy*, meaning foolish. The last vowel sound of *noddy* is [i:], so now we are in a position to infer that affirmative *aye* is pronounced [i:]. Speed seems to think that Protheus thinks he mistakenly meant *I* as a first person pronoun. He clarifies by saying *I say I*, which we could clarify today by writing 'I say aye'. *Set together* this does sound a bit odd, or *noddy*, because both the first person pronoun *I* and the affirmative *I* (i.e. 'aye') are said the same way. This being so, we have evidence that in this period the first person pronoun *I* was pronounced [i:].

Statements made by grammarians and spelling reformers

Consider the evidence from John Hart's *An Orthographie* (1569) that the spelling <ee> was pronounced [i:]

We call the e, in learning the A.B.C. in the sound of i, and do double the e, for that sound, as in see the Bee doth flee.

Here, he is saying that the letter <e> represented the sound 'i', that is to say, [i:] (we know from elsewhere in Hart's work that the letter <i> was used for that sound). What he then reveals is that words such as *bee* and *flee* have that sound, as they do today. This is interesting because we know that <ee> originally had the value [e:] in ME. Hart, then, helps pinpoint when this change might have taken place. Of course, such evidence is dependent on the scholar's interpretation and attitudes, as well as the accuracy of the transcription used.

Clues from other languages

If we know the pronunciations of words in particular languages and in particular periods, we may be in a position to infer across languages. For example, words imported from French have given clues about the timing of pronunciation changes in English. When the French word *age* was borrowed into the English language its first vowel was closer to [a:]. The pronunciation of this word in English has followed a whole group of words like *name* (OE *nama*), words that have been part of the Great Vowel Shift. So, given that *age* fell in line with this development, there seems to be some tangential evidence that when it arrived words such as *name* had not yet changed their vowel to the diphthong [ei].

Following paths of development

Sometimes we might have some evidence to suggest that the changes in the pronunciation of a word or group of words has followed a particular path. We might not have evidence of pronunciations at each stage of the path, but often we can infer the missing links. A case in point would be the Great Vowel Shift, where we might not have evidence for all stages of the shift for any particular item, but we can infer what is missing on the basis of the well-established general path of change.

Of course, none of these individual sources of evidence is particularly robust. The ideal scenario for any specific case is where one can bring several sources of evidence to bear.

Linguistic reconstruction, relying especially on the indirect evidence mentioned in the last two points of the list in the previous paragraph, has been the mainstay of comparative philology or **comparative linguistics**. One idea is that different languages from very different geographical areas of the world are ‘genetically’ related, and by systematic comparison of forms we can reconstruct linguistic genealogies, such as the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) family tree. Table 10.2 gives a sense of some of the evidence used in deriving PIE. Use of the asterisk is a convention to indicate that we have no attested form– it is a reconstructed member of the proto-language.

Language group	Language	'father'	'mother'	'two'	'three'	'tooth'
Germanic	Old English	<i>fædar</i>	<i>meder</i>	<i>twá</i>	<i>þrí</i>	<i>tóþ</i>
	Old Saxon	<i>fadar</i>	<i>mōder</i>	<i>twâ</i>	<i>thrie</i>	<i>tand</i>
	Old Norse	<i>faðer</i>	<i>móðir</i>	<i>tveir</i>	<i>þrír</i>	<i>tonn</i>
Italic	Latin	<i>pater</i>	<i>māter</i>	<i>duo</i>	<i>trēs</i>	<i>dens / dents</i>
Hellenic	Greek	<i>πατήρ (pater)</i>	<i>ματέρα (mater)</i>	<i>δύο (duo)</i>	<i>τρεῖς (treis)</i>	<i>ὀδούς (odous)</i>
Celtic	Old Irish	<i>athir</i>	<i>māthir</i>	<i>dá</i>	<i>tri</i>	<i>dét</i>
Indic	Sanskrit	<i>pitr</i>	<i>matr</i>	<i>dwau</i>	<i>trayas</i>	<i>dans / danta</i>
Proto-Indo-European	-	<i>*pōtēr</i>	<i>*māter</i>	<i>*dwou</i>	<i>*trejes</i>	<i>*dentis</i>

Table 10.2. Language families

Note that the focus is on some kind of core lexicon – numbers, close kinship terms and ‘basic’ words (e.g. *blood*, *egg*, *tail*, *ear*, *hand*, *sun*, *water*) – as core items are more likely to represent the language variety in hand, being more resistant to borrowing, something that would confuse the language variety categories (various lists of supposedly core items can be found here: <http://cals.conlang.org/word/list/>). Reconstructing the forms of the proto-language has partly been done on the basis of examining existing forms for commonalities. Thus one might suppose that similarities amongst the items listed in the columns of Table 10.2 reflect an earlier word. In addition, reconstruction has proceeded on the basis of identifying paths of change. A famous case of this is Grimm’s Law, described in section 10.4.1. Note that in Table

10.2 Germanic forms seem to be the odd ones out in having word initial <f> instead of <p>, which is also the PIE form.

Still, linguistic reconstruction remains calculated guess work, and remains dependent on how good the initial evidence is in the first place. In particular, it rests on the assumption that particular words represent specific languages and only those languages. But work in dialectology has shown repeatedly that languages rarely if ever have sharp edges; instead, one blurs into another, giving rise to a dialect continuum.

KEY POINTS: Data and methods

- ☐ Primary data are records of actual language, such as archival records, letters, prose and poetry.
- ☐ Secondary data are commentaries on the language, such as dictionaries, grammars and style guides.
- ☐ Electronic corpora of primary data allow for the computational analysis of large quantities of language data.
- ☐ Linguistic reconstruction involves piecing together direct and indirect evidence to generate a sense of what a language was like at an earlier point in its history.

Exercise 10.5

(a) *Comparing texts within a genre*

Compare the two versions of an extract from the English Bible below. What is different? At what linguistic level is it different?

But Peter sate vvithout in the court: and there came to him one vvenche, saying: Thou also vvast vvith IESVS the Galilean. But he denied before them all, saying, I vvot not vvhat thou sayest. (The Rheims Bible 1582)

Meanwhile Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard when a serving-maid accosted him and said, 'You were there too with Jesus the Galilean.' Peter denied it in face of them all. 'I do not know what you mean', he said. (New English Bible 1961)

(b) *Reconstructing old pronunciations*

Read the first stanza from Christopher Marlowe's poem 'The Passionate Sheeheard to his Love' (1600). What might the rhyme scheme suggest about the pronunciation of *prove* in Early Modern English? How certain can you be and what other evidence would help to confirm your hypothesis? (It might help to read the full poem online).

Come live with mee, and be my Love,
And we will all the pleasures prove,
That Vallies, groves, hills and fieldes,
Woods, or steepie mountaine yeeldes.

(in Keegan 2001: 174)

10.6 Summary

The techniques of historical linguistics have allowed linguists to (i) determine how languages change over time and (ii) suggest reasons for why such changes might occur. In this chapter we have introduced some of the main theories, models and findings from historical linguistics, as well as given you an insight into how historical linguists go about investigating language change.

What makes historical linguistics so challenging is that, as Aitchison (2001: 21) points out, explaining language change is fraught with the potential for misinterpreting evidence. Even Aitchison does not manage to avoid this danger completely. Discussing how rhymes can indicate older pronunciations, she notes that a ‘tongue/wrong’ rhyme in an EModE poem tells us that *tongue* used to be pronounced to rhyme with *wrong*, the implicit assumption being that this is not the case anymore. But this claim overlooks the fact that *tongue* is still pronounced to rhyme with *wrong* in many varieties of northern English. This particular case highlights the importance of not prioritising the standard language at the expense of regional varieties, something which Crystal (2004) points out has been a particular problem in the study of the history of English (the same charge might be levelled at the diachronic study of many languages). Sometimes, of course, in cases where data is so scarce that we are relying on linguistic reconstruction, there may be a limit to what we can legitimately claim about regional varieties. But in cases where enough evidence exists for us to consider other possible variations, it is important not to focus on standard forms at the expense of regional variation. This issue underlines the importance of triangulation in historical linguistics; that is, using as many checks as is possible (e.g. primary data, secondary data, reconstruction, etc.) to increase the confidence we can have in our claims.

Finally, it should be noted that there is a significant degree of crossover between historical linguistics and some of the concerns of other sub-disciplines of language study. Although historical linguists have traditionally focussed more on formal change in language, functional change is increasingly being investigated (see, for example, the studies in Watts and Trudgill 2000), for which it is necessary to draw on disciplines such as pragmatics, stylistics, sociolinguistics and literary studies. It is also the case that language change is sometimes deliberately effected (or at least attempted), by governmental or non-governmental organisations imposing policies to influence language use. A recent well-known example is the German spelling reform imposed collectively in 1996 by the governments of Austria, Germany, Lichtenstein and Switzerland. Such macro-level language planning brings its own complications, not least of which is the issue of whether such interventions in linguistic development are either feasible or desirable. The same issues are faced by linguists engaged in trying to preserve endangered languages. And the common factor in all investigations of language development is that change is both inevitable and fascinating.

Suggestions for further reading:

Aitchison, J. (2012) *Language Change: Progress or Decay?* (4th edn). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

This book is a highly readable introduction to the how and why of language change, covering all of the issues described in this chapter in a genuinely accessible way.

McColl Millar, Robert. 2007. *Trask's historical linguistics*. London: Hodder.

This is a revised version of Trask, R.L. (1996) *Historical linguistics*. It is a good, readable introduction with examples from many languages.

Campbell, L. (2013) *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction* (3rd edn). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

This is an accessible introductory textbook, very much focussed on explaining how to *do* historical linguistics.

Answers to exercises:

Exercise 10.1

Most people will respond by talking about new words that have entered the language – and these will often be words that are foregrounded by virtue of their relatively rapid arrival and possibly the creativity that has gone into their formation. So, for example, they might mention new blends such as *braggadocious* or conversions such as *to sex up*. It's unlikely that they will talk about sound changes or grammatical developments. The reason for this is that because such developments take place gradually, it is difficult to perceive them, not least because change here tends to be relatively slow. One of the consequences of this for historical linguists is that we often need an awful lot of data, gathered over a long period, before we can confirm, describe and explain a change.

Exercise 10.2

Imagine you walk into a pub where two people are playing a game of pool (pocket billiards if you're reading this in North America!). You don't need to know how the game began in order to observe which player is winning. You simply look at the number of remaining red and yellow balls (or stripes and solids) on the table. By the same token, if you want to study language use at a particular point in time, you don't necessarily need to know how that language began (i.e. synchronic analysis doesn't require initial diachronic analysis). But if you want to study language change over time, not only do you need to track developments diachronically, you also need to know what that language was like at an earlier stage (i.e. diachronic analysis requires initial synchronic analysis).

Exercise 10.3

- (d) Most people assume that the word *outrage* is a compound of *out* plus *rage*, and this seems to be consistent with the current sense (i.e. out of the normal bounds of rage, a kind of super rage). The word is in fact the word *outr* (from Latin *ultra*, meaning 'beyond') plus the noun-forming suffix *-age*, the sense being to be in a state of being beyond any kind of norm. This is a case of reanalysis; people have reanalysed the word in a different way. (This particular example is discussed in a number of books, including McColl Millar 2007).
- (e) To continue the kind of examples mentioned in section 10.3, the use of *sick* as a positive evaluation is a good case of expressiveness. But expressiveness need not

only apply to the lexical items. Recent years have seen the advent of the ‘high rising tone’, a rising pitch in the final elements of a sentence with the result that statements sound more like questions. This phenomenon is present in Southern California, especially amongst teenagers, and also in Australia, and seems to be spreading to other Englishes too. One of its functions seems to be to create interest for listeners and encourage their participation, hence it is a matter of expressiveness.

- (f) A striking case is the very frequent Northern variant of the word *no*, i.e. *nay*. Consider that modern Danish and Swedish have *nei*, which sounds identical. Similarly, we might point to the northern word *lake*, meaning ‘to play’, and Swedish *leka*, the northern *kirk*, for a church, and Danish *kirke*, or the northern *beck*, for a brook or stream, and Swedish *back*. These, and others, are clues to the Viking settlement of Northern areas, given that the Vikings come from the area of modern Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

Exercise 10.4

(a) Grammatical change

The expression *gonna* is an example of grammaticalization. It is originally formed from ‘going to’, with the original, more concrete sense of moving from one place to another. Today, it has no sense of changing place but forms the more grammatical function of marking reference to the future. Note it is also undergone phonetic reduction.

(b) Lexical change: borrowing

Borrowing is facilitated by contact, and often motivated by prestige (we copy items that are perceived to be prestigious in order to sound more prestigious ourselves). Other factors can include a kind of hole filling, where the borrowed item fills a need created by changes in the environment (e.g. the arrival of a new concept or item). In some respects, *borrowing* is an odd term to use to describe the practice of taking words from other languages, since there is little sense in which the loans are ever given back. *Copying* may better describe the process.

(c) Lexical change: word formation

- i. Derivation (*de* + *friend*)
- ii. Borrowing (from Chinese *gǒuqǐzǐ* [goji berry])
- iii. Blending (*golden* + *doodle*; note that the first part of the blend is from *Golden Retriever* while the second part is derived from the morphological reanalysis of another blend: *labradoodle* = *Labrador* + *Poodle*)
- iv. Compounding (*i* + *Pod*; note that the first compound is an initialisation of *internet* and is potentially undergoing a degree of semantic bleaching, such that *i* can simply be a prefix to indicate cutting-edge technology)
- v. Derivation (*metabolome* + *ic*)
- vi. Acronymisation (*Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome*)
- vii. Borrowing (from Japanese *Sūdoku*)
- viii. Compounding, followed by inflection (*water* + *board* + *ing*)

(d) Semantic change.

Amusing and *awful* originally refer to something that could cause a state of: musing or staring in astonishment; awe, dread or reverential fear, whilst *artificial* meant that something was full of artifice or skill. James's statement is mildly humorous today largely because of the second and third items which have undergone pejoration, but even today's sense of *amusing*, causing laughter, is hardly appropriate for a magnificent cathedral. More generally, it should be noted that all of them have shifted towards greater subjectivity, that is, away from merely describing an emotional state or property of the building towards a strong evaluation of it.

Exercise 10.5

(c) *Comparing texts within a genre*

A wealth of observations are possible. For example, in the 1582 version we see: *sate* vs. *was sitting* (progressive forms had not been established), *vvenche* vs. *serving-maid* (today, *wench* has a more pejorative meaning), *thou* vs. *you* (*you* was not the only second pronoun form), *IESVS* vs. *Jesus* (now, the letter <i> has now given rise to the letter <j> and <v> is only used for the consonant), *denied* vs. *denied it* (the verb *denied* now must take an object, it is transitive), *vvot* vs. *know* (*vvot* is now obsolete), and so on.

(d) *Reconstructing old pronunciations*

The rhyme scheme of the poem is AABB, and in the second and third stanzas the end-rhymes are full rhymes. This structure suggests that *love* and *prove* also rhyme. (It is possible that they may be eye-rhymes, though this is unlikely at a time when spelling was still not standardised). The question then concerns the value of the vowel sound in both words. The likelihood is that it was [ʊ] rather than [u:]. Crystal (2009) draws on secondary data to ascertain this, quoting from Ben Jonson's *English Grammar* in which Jonson notes that the letter <o> 'soundeth...akin to *u*; as *cosen*, *dozen*, *mother*, *brother*, *love*, *prove*'. Of course, we cannot discount the possibility of other regional pronunciations where *love* may have been pronounced [u:], but the evidence from Jonson at least confirms that /prʊv/ was an accepted pronunciation at the time.

GLOSSARY

actuation: The initiation of a linguistic innovation.

case: A linguistic system used in some languages to indicate the grammatical function (e.g. subject, object, etc.) of words in a sentence by the addition of morphological inflections to nouns, pronouns and adjectives.

chain shift: A model from historical linguistics to explain sound changes in language by imaging phonemes to be like links in a chain; when one moves position, the others inevitably move too so that each phoneme ends up sounding like the one before it prior to the change.

corpora: (singular *corpus*) An electronic database of text, usually sampled to be maximally representative of a particular language or language variety. Used to test hypotheses and/or construct theories of language.

diachronic: From the Greek *diachronous*; diachronic linguistics is concerned with the study of language as it develops over time; see also *synchronic*.

economy: A potential explanation for why languages change over time; centred on the notion that speakers develop their language in order to be more economical, e.g. through reduction and lenition.

expressiveness: A potential explanation for why languages change over time centred on the notion that speakers develop their language in order to be more expressive and creative, e.g. through the addition of new words to the language's vocabulary.

grammaticalisation: The gradual process by which items undergo development to become more grammatical in character.

Great Vowel Shift: A sound change that occurred in English between approximately 1400 and 1650 and which resulted in the raising of the seven long vowels of Middle English.

intersubjectivity: In general linguistics terms, a concept that describes the communicative necessity of paying attention to an addressee's position and face needs. In theories of semantic change, a concept that describes cases where lexical items develop meanings which encode attitudes towards the addressee (e.g. the use of honorifics such as *sir* or *madam*).

lexicalisation: The gradual process by which items undergo development to become more lexical in character.

lenition: A phonological process whereby consonants become weaker, based on the idea that consonants can be compared in terms of relative strength. Examples might include a voiceless stop changing to a voiceless fricative, or a voiced fricative changing to a liquid.

linguistic genealogy: A model of the development of language that sees the relationships between languages as similar to the relationships between family members; i.e. all languages have parent languages, siblings and can develop offspring. The model has given rise to the notion of language family trees, and assumes languages to be traceable back to a single common ancestor, sometimes characterised as *Proto-World* or *Proto-Human*.

linguistic reconstruction: The reconstruction of a language (or aspects of a language, e.g. its phonology) based on indirect evidence. Linguistic reconstruction is necessary in cases where little or no primary data exists of the language in question.

loan: A lexical item borrowed (i.e. copied) from another language.

number: A grammatical category that expresses the distinction between the singular and plural forms of nouns, pronouns and determiners and encompasses the grammatical agreement of these with verbs. Number can be indicated by inflection (e.g. ‘chairs’, ‘babies’) or a change in word form (e.g. the distinct pronominal forms ‘I’ [singular] and ‘we’ [plural] in English).

philology: The study of historical texts produced at a particular time and in a particular context, drawing on insights from linguistics, literary studies and history. Philology was an important precursor to the current discipline of historical linguistics.

primary data: Examples of language as it is (or was in the past) actually used; e.g. newspapers, fiction, letters, etc.

propagation: The spread of a linguistic innovation, such as a new word or a sound change, to all speakers of the language in which the actuation occurred.

Proto-Indo-European (PIE): A hypothetical, reconstructed ancestor of Indo-European languages. PIE was first proposed by the British philologist Sir William Jones, who was moved to postulate its existence after noticing a significant number of similarities between Sanskrit and classical Greek and Latin.

reanalysis: A type of linguistic change whereby (i) a word’s surface form remains the same but its part-of-speech changes or (ii) the morphological structure of a word is reanalysed by speakers (e.g. *heli* + *copter* as opposed to Greek *helico* [helix] + *pter* [wing]).

secondary data: Contemporary commentaries on how language is (or was in the past) actually used, e.g. dictionaries, grammars, guides to usage, etc.

subjectification: A gradual process of semantic change whereby the meanings of an item come to express the speaker’s beliefs or attitudes more closely.

SVO language: A typological description of a language in which the syntactic structure subject-verb-object is the most common order of sentence elements (cf., for example, SOV and VOS).

synchronic: From Greek *synchronous*; synchronic linguistics is concerned with the study of language at a particular point in time (as opposed to the study of the development of language over time); see also *diachronic*.

teleological mechanisms: Mechanisms that preserve the internal balance of the linguistic system, including such phenomena as analogy (linguistic copying) or hole-filling to help enhance uniformity.

Uniformitarian Principle: The notion that the general properties of language were the same in the past as they are in the present. The Uniformitarian Principle places restrictions on linguistic reconstruction, such that reconstructions cannot posit forms and possibilities that could not have been the case at some past time.

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Historical Linguistics

Jonathan Culpeper and Dan McIntyre

(1) Middle English spellings of present day English *mother*, *hither*, *weather* and *father* included *moder*, *hider*, *weder* and *fader*, suggesting a diachronic change in pronunciation of the <d> from [d] to [ð]. What phonological process describes this change?

- (a) fortition
- (b) vowel reduction
- (c) **lenition**
- (d) vowel raising
- (e) assimilation

(2) Labov's (1966) notion of 'change from above' describes the process whereby:

- (a) **speakers consciously select a prestige variable to emulate**
- (b) speakers unconsciously select a prestige variable to emulate
- (c) speakers consciously select a non-prestigious variable to emulate
- (d) speakers unconsciously select a non-prestigious variable to emulate
- (e) speakers prescribe linguistic change through codification

(3) The words *complicit*, *pea*, *televise* and *decadent* are examples of which word formation process?

- (a) derivation
- (b) acronymisation
- (c) clipping
- (d) **back-formation**
- (e) blending

(4) The gradual fusion of the prepositional phrase *for ever* into a single word (*forever*) is an example of what process?

- (a) grammaticalisation
- (b) **lexicalisation**
- (c) Americanisation
- (d) textualisation
- (e) cliticisation

(5) *True or false*: the Great Vowel Shift describes the process in English whereby English spelling was standardised.

(6) The development of the word *but* from a preposition to mean 'outside' to its present day English status as a conjunction is an example of which type of semantic change?

- (a) a movement towards more abstract meaning
- (b) **a movement towards more textual meaning**

- (c) a movement towards more attitudinal meaning
- (d) a movement towards more explicit meaning
- (e) a movement towards more implicit meaning

(7) The pronunciation of *house* as [hu:s] in some regional varieties of English (e.g. Scottish English) is evidence that:

- (a) the Great Vowel Shift resulted in a uniform pronunciation through the British Isles
- (b) the Great Vowel Shift is still ongoing
- (c) the Great Vowel Shift caused Scottish English to change more than other varieties of English
- (d) the Great Vowel Shift did not affect all regional varieties of English
- (e) the effects of the Great Vowel Shift were restricted to London

(8) The existence of Proto-Indo-European was postulated on the basis of:

- (a) linguistic reconstruction
- (b) corpus evidence
- (c) evidence from secondary data
- (d) evidence from primary data
- (e) Grimm's Law

(9) Conversion is a word formation process that is impossible in synthetic languages because:

- (a) changing word class is only possible in language contact situations
- (b) changing word class involves the addition of inflections
- (c) synthetic languages have finite vocabularies
- (d) synthetic languages are not subject to linguistic change
- (e) forming new words via conversion is a contemporary phenomenon

(10) *True or false*: the motivation for all linguistic change is economy

Historical Linguistics

Jonathan Culpeper and Dan McIntyre

Group Exercises

Task 1

This exercise is designed to show you that examining historical texts can reveal information not only about the formal elements of language at a particular point in time, but also, potentially, about usage and meanings in historical contexts – about their pragmatics.

1. First of all, read this extract from a collection of stories about the so-called ‘mad men of Gotam’ (Gotham is a village in Nottinghamshire, England). Printed around 1565, it is an example of Early Modern English. Work together to try and decipher any words you’re not sure about (reading aloud will probably help).

Theare was two men of Gotam, & the one was goyng to the market to Nottyngham to buye sheepe and the other dyd come from the Market, and bothe met together vppon Nottingham brydge. Well met said the one to the other. Whether be you going (sayde hee that came from Nottyngeham, to hym that wente to Nottingham.) Marye sayde be that wente to Nottyngham, I goe to the market to buye sheepe. Buye sheepe saide the other? and whyche waye wylte thou brynge them. Marye sayde the other. I wyll brynge them ouer thys bridge. By Robyn hoode sayd he that cam from Nottingham, but thou shalte not. By Mayde Maryon sayde he that wente to the market but I wyll. Thou shalte not sayde the other. I wyll sayde the other. Let bere, sayd the one. Shows theare, sayde the other. They beat theyr staues agaynste the grounde, one agaynste the other, as theare had bene a hundred seepe betwixt them. Holde in theare layde the one. Beware of f...yng ouer the brydge of my sheepe sayd the other, I care not sa[...]d the other, they shal not come thys waye by the masse. By the masse sayde the other, but they shall. Then sayde the other, and thou make mucche to doe, I wyll put my fynger in thy mouthe. A turde thou wilte, saide the other. And as they weare at thys contencion, another man of Gotam dyd come from the market wyth a sacke of meale vppon an horse. And seying & hearing his neyghbours at stryfe, for sheepe, and none betwixt them said a fooles will you neuer learne wyt. Helpe we saide bee that had the meale, and laye my sacke vppon my shulder, they dyd so. And he went to the one side of the bridge, and vnlosed the mouth of the sacke, and did shake oute all hys meale in to the ryuer, now neyghbour sayde this man, howe much meale is theare in my sacke nowe, marye theare is noue at all sayde they, Now by my faythe sayd he euen as mucche witte is in youre twoo headdes, to stryue for that thyng which ye haue not. Which was the wisest of al these three persons? Judge you.

(Merie Tales of the Mad Men of Gotam, c. 1565)

In Early Modern English, there was a greater variety of pronouns than in Present Day English. Second person pronouns were considerably more complex. The pronouns in use around the time that the text in question was printed were as follows:

	First-person	Second-person	Third-person
Subject			
Singular	I	thou	he/she/[h]it
Plural	we	ye	they
Object			
Singular	me	thee	him/her/[h]it
Plural	us	you	them
Possessive			
Singular	mine	thine	his/hers/his
Plural	ours	yours	theirs

- Now look back at the text and identify all the second person pronouns. Are they always used in the way the table above suggests?
- By taking into account what happens in the story, can you explain any variation you notice in pronoun use? Discuss your opinions as a group.

You should notice that sometimes plural second person pronouns are used when one person is addressing another (a situation where the table above would lead us to expect the singular form). You will also notice that the characters in the story stop using the plural form and start to use the singular form at the point at which they start arguing. This seems to suggest that the choice of whether to use the singular or plural form is not simply a case of grammatical number but also one of pragmatics, the construction and understanding of meanings in context, specifically politeness. You can find out more about this issue by reading Brown and Gilman's now famous article on this issue:

Brown, R. and Gilman, A. (1960). The pronouns of power and solidarity. In T. A. Sebeok (Ed.), *Style in Language* (pp. 253-76). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press

Task 2

As a group, investigate this issue further by examining other Early Modern texts. See if you can identify the point at which the pragmatic usage described by Brown and Gilman (1960) begins to change. You could do this in a number of ways. Some of you could search corpora of Early Modern English (e.g. the Corpus of Early Modern English Dialogues, available via <http://tinyurl.com/l3mn79t>, or another corpus via <http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/CoRD/corpora/index.html>). Others could examine texts downloaded from a database such as Early English Books Online. You can restrict your search by date to identify EMode texts in which you can follow up hypotheses gleaned from your corpus analyses. Consider also whether the texts you examine validate or invalidate the claims found in Brown and Gilman.

Biographical Notes

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