Core Unit 4: Language change

**Lecture 4A: Language Change: Good, bad or inevitable?**

Hello everyone. Thank you for coming to today’s lecture. It’s good to see you all here. So, let’s get started, then. To begin with, just have a look at the text on the slide here. Does anybody know where this text comes from? Well, this is Geoffrey Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, written in the fourteenth century. Just by looking at these two lines, you can see that there are many changes that have taken place in the English language over time, and basically, well, that’s what the topic of today’s lecture is going to be – language change. The lecture is basically divided into three parts. Firstly, I’d like to talk about what changes have taken place. Secondly, we’re going to look a little bit at why, and thirdly, what about some attitudes to language change. Ok?

So, let’s get started then, with vocabulary. Well, firstly, just by looking at those two lines of *The Canterbury Tales*, you can imagine that there are many many changes which have taken place. I’m not going to talk about all of these today; I’m just going to talk about two aspects of vocabulary.

Firstly, does anyone here like eating beef, or pork or mutton? Well, as Svartvik and Leech say, these are some of the many borrowed words in English from French. English has got many words which are borrowed from other languages, largely as a result of foreign influences, or military invasions. For example, in 1066, the Normans invaded Britain, and that saw the introduction of a large number of French words into the language, many of which still exist today, so that resulted in large language change.

Another aspect of vocabulary, is what the writer Fischer calls, lexical expansion. So, by this I mean when ‘coffee’ was first introduced in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, well, we needed a word for it - we needed a new word for it, so ‘coffee’. The same with something like ‘tobacco’, and the same is happening today. So, in the 21st century, we have a lot of technological words, like, em, ‘spreadsheet’, ‘internet’, ‘download’. All of these are expanding the language, and therefore changing it.

Em…The second major change I want to talk about is slang. Now, slang has been defined elsewhere – I just want to give a few examples here. Em, so slang – the thing with slang is that it’s often temporary. So it changes or it goes out of date quite often – quite a lot. An example is the word *groovy*, which was very common perhaps in the sixties or seventies, maybe the nineties. The meaning of *groovy* is ‘cool’. However, if somebody used it today, it might be seen as a little bit outdated. You could say the same for slang which is used nowadays, that will probably go out of date soon. So, slang causes many changes in language.

Now let’s move on to the next part, and here I want to talk about why language…why languages change. And here I want to look at language change from a sociolinguistic point of view. Gumperz defines sociolinguistics as how language and society mix together, which can result in language change, and here I am going to talk about three reasons.

So, firstly, Fischer describes urbanization as a reason for language change, and he says that when people moved from the countryside maybe to a big city, they bring their language with them. It might be a different language, it could be a different accent, different pronunciation, and that mixes with the language already established in a city, and that causes changes.

A second reason, again according to Fischer, is media and Hollywood. So, in the twentieth century, as TV and radio became more widespread, this created a type of linguistic leveling, meaning that basically many viewers or listeners were exposed to certain forms of English. Fischer, himself, is from New Zealand, and he talks about when he returned there in the 1990s, he noticed people using a lot of Americanisms in their speech, and he says that this was a big change from when he had been there in the 1970s. The reason for this, he says, is film and Hollywood. So, the media and films seem to be another reason for causing language change.

And thirdly, very briefly, ‘globalisation’. David Crystal talks about…for example, if there is a German businessman talking to a Japanese businessman – they have their varieties of English, they communicate together and this can result in change as well. So, international English is another cause of language change.

So, ok, that is some reasons why language…why languages change. Now, finally, in the last part of today’s lecture, I want to look at some attitudes towards language change, and basically, so, this means, is it a good or a bad thing? And it’s the linguist Jean Aitchison who writes a lot about this. She describes hundreds of years of language change and hundreds of years of attitudes to language change as largely being negative. She describes writers, even from the fourteenth century who complained about new forms of language that was making everything incomprehensible. And you might know Samuel Johnson – in around the eighteenth century. He was so much against language decay – language decay meaning that the language is becoming worse – he was so much against this, that he created his dictionary of English language, and in his dictionary, he generally included forms of English which were used by upper classes of society because he saw that idiomatic phrases or colloquialisms were basically ignorant or used by people who were uneducated.

So, language change has had a lot of negative attitudes in the past and Jean Aitchison calls these people, like Samuel Johnson, language purists, basically saying that they believed language had a pure form, and that they want to return to this period. However, as we’ve seen in the lecture, language never had a pure form, because it was changing all the time.

Now, Aitchison also points out that language change is natural, inevitable, and continuous, and this is true. Languages… a language must change, as societies change. A language must… A language must change itself to meet the needs of a society. Now, for example, we are in the twenty-first century; we have…our society has different needs from even a hundred years ago, so the language must continually change to meet our needs as a society, so language change is definitely a necessary thing, and it will continue to happen.

Ok, so, I’m afraid, well…that is all we’ve got time for today. You can see my reference list below; there’s lots of more reading there if you wish. Now, before our next seminar, I’m just going to leave you with something to think about. So, today I’ve spoken a lot about English, but what about your language? What changes have taken place in your language? What are the reasons for these changes? Are these changes good or bad? I’d love to know your thoughts about this and maybe we can talk about this the next time. But for now, I’m afraid that’s all – so, see you again, thank you for coming. Bye bye.

大家好。感谢你们来参加今天的讲座。很高兴在这里看到大家。那么，让我们开始吧。首先，请看一下幻灯片上的文字。有人知道这段文字来自哪里吗？嗯，这是杰弗里-乔叟的《坎特伯雷故事》，写于14世纪。仅仅通过看这两行字，你就可以看到，随着时间的推移，英语语言发生了许多变化，基本上，嗯，这就是今天讲座的主题--语言变化。讲座基本上分为三个部分。首先，我想谈一谈发生了哪些变化。第二，我们要看一下原因，第三，对语言变化的一些态度如何。好吗？

那么，让我们从词汇开始吧。好吧，首先，只要看看《坎特伯雷故事集》的这两句话，你就可以想象到发生了很多很多变化。我今天不打算谈论所有这些；我只想谈一谈词汇的两个方面。

首先，这里有人喜欢吃牛肉，或猪肉或羊肉吗？嗯，正如斯瓦特维克和李奇所说，这些是英语中从法语借来的许多词汇中的一部分。英语有很多词是从其他语言借来的，主要是受外国影响，或军事入侵的结果。例如，在1066年，诺曼人入侵英国，这时，大量的法语词汇被引入到语言中，其中许多至今仍然存在，所以这导致了大量的语言变化。

词汇的另一个方面，就是作家费舍尔所说的，词汇扩张。所以，我的意思是，当'咖啡'在十六或十七世纪首次被引入时，好吧，我们需要一个词来形容它--我们需要一个新词来形容它，所以'咖啡'。像 "烟草 "这样的东西也是如此，今天也是如此。因此，在21世纪，我们有很多技术词汇，比如，"电子表格"、"互联网"、"下载"。所有这些都在扩展语言，因此也在改变它。

EM...我想谈的第二个主要变化是俚语。现在，俚语已经在其他地方被定义了--我只想在这里举几个例子。EM，所以俚语 -- 俚语的问题是，它往往是暂时的。所以它经常变化或过时--相当多。一个例子是groovy这个词，也许在60年代或70年代，也许在90年代非常普遍。groovy的意思是 "酷"。然而，如果今天有人使用它，它可能会被视为有点过时。 你可以对现在使用的俚语说同样的话，那可能很快就会过时了。所以，俚语引起了语言的许多变化。

现在让我们进入下一个部分，在这里我想谈谈为什么语言......为什么语言会发生变化。而在这里，我想从社会语言学的角度来看待语言的变化。Gumperz将社会语言学定义为语言和社会是如何混合在一起的，这可能会导致语言的变化，在这里我想谈一下三个原因。

所以，首先，费舍尔把城市化描述为语言变化的一个原因，他说，当人们从农村也许搬到大城市时，他们会把他们的语言带过来。这可能是一种不同的语言，可能是不同的口音，不同的发音，而这与城市中已经建立的语言混合在一起，这就导致了变化。

第二个原因，同样根据费舍尔的说法，是媒体和好莱坞。因此，在二十世纪，随着电视和广播的普及，这就产生了一种语言平移，也就是说，基本上许多观众或听众都接触到了某些形式的英语。费舍尔本人来自新西兰，他谈到当他在20世纪90年代回到那里时，他注意到人们在说话时使用了很多美国话，他说这与他20世纪70年代在那里时有很大变化。他说，造成这种情况的原因是电影和好莱坞。所以，媒体和电影似乎是造成语言变化的另一个原因。

第三，非常简短地，"全球化"。David Crystal谈到......例如，如果有一个德国商人和一个日本商人交谈--他们有自己的英语品种，他们一起交流，这也会导致变化。 所以，国际英语是语言变化的另一个原因。

所以，好了，这就是语言......语言变化的一些原因。现在，最后，在今天讲座的最后一部分，我想看看对语言变化的一些态度，基本上，这意味着，它是一件好事还是坏事？而这是语言学家Jean Aitchison写了很多关于这个问题的文章。她描述了几百年来的语言变化和几百年来对语言变化的态度，基本上都是负面的。她描述了一些作家，甚至从十四世纪开始，他们就抱怨新的语言形式使一切变得难以理解。而你可能知道塞缪尔-约翰逊--大约在18世纪。他非常反对语言的衰落--语言衰落的意思是语言变得越来越差--他非常反对这一点，所以他创建了他的英语词典，在他的词典中，他一般包括社会上层阶级使用的英语形式，因为他看到，成语短语或口语基本上是无知的，或由没有受过教育的人使用。

所以，语言的变化在过去有很多负面的态度，Jean Aitchison把这些人，比如Samuel Johnson，称为语言纯粹主义者，基本上说他们认为语言有一个纯粹的形式，他们想回到这个时期。然而，正如我们在讲座中所看到的，语言从来没有一个纯粹的形式，因为它一直在变化。

现在，艾奇逊也指出，语言的变化是自然的、不可避免的、持续的，这一点是正确的。语言......一种语言必须变化，因为社会在变化。 一种语言必须......一种语言必须改变自己以满足社会的需要。例如，现在我们处于21世纪；我们有......我们的社会与一百年前有不同的需求，所以语言必须不断变化以满足我们作为一个社会的需求，所以语言变化绝对是一件必要的事情，而且它将继续发生。

好吧，那么，恐怕......这就是我们今天的全部时间。你可以在下面看到我的参考书目；如果你愿意的话，那里有很多更多的阅读。现在，在我们的下一个研讨会之前，我只想给你们留下一些思考的东西。所以，今天我讲了很多关于英语的内容，但你的语言呢？你的语言发生了什么变化？这些变化的原因是什么？这些变化是好是坏？我很想知道你对此的想法，也许我们可以在下一次讨论这个问题。但是现在，恐怕就到此为止了--所以，再见了，谢谢你的到来。再见了。