1.1. External and internal history

External history socio-historical events that have happened to the speakers of a language and which have led to changes in the language itself. **External changes are unpredictable**. Among those events:

- **Cultural events**, e.g. introduction of the printing press (ultimately due to a technological advance) (⇒ increase in reading public; diffusion of learning and culture; standardization).
- **Changes in ideology**, e.g. the introduction of Christianity, the spread of the ideas of the Renaissance (⇒ introduction of the Latin alphabet; introduction of borrowings; English follows the model of classical languages, also in syntax).
- **Economic and social changes**, e.g. industrialization, other economically motivated social movements ⇒ changes in society ⇒ changes in status of certain social classes; migrations may change the makeup of a society (⇒ changes in the prestige of certain social groups may trigger the selection of certain linguistic variants; migratory movements may bring about influences between languages and between dialects).
- **Political changes**, like invasions, colonization and wars (⇒ language contact ⇒ borrowing ⇒ lexical change).
- **Scientific changes** (⇒ vocabulary expansion; semantic change).

> The history of a language is intimately related to the history of the community of its speakers, so neither can be studied without considering the other. The external history of a language is the history of its speakers as their history affects the language they use. It includes such factors as the topography of the land where they live, their migrations, their wars, their conquests of and by others, their government, their arts and sciences, their economics and technology, their religions and philosophies, their trade and commerce, their marriage customs and family patterns, their architecture, their sports and recreations, and indeed every aspect of their lives.
>
> Language is so basic to human activity that there is nothing human beings do that does not influence and, in turn, is not influenced by the language they speak.
> (Algeo 2001:1)

Internal history is the record of the linguistic developments of a language over time, how its vocabulary, grammar and phonology have changed. For example, the loss or addition of a linguistic element (e.g. loss of [ç, x] in the Middle Ages; the emergence of the *get*-passive in the 18th century), the recategorization of a given word (e.g. a preposition which develops into a conjunction). Changes at one level (e.g. phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics) may have an impact on another level (e.g. the weakening of unstressed vowels eventually leads to the loss of nominal inflections, which in turn triggered the rigidification of clausal word order). Internal changes are more predictable than external changes, because language is a system. Change crops up where the system presents weaknesses or irregularities.

Language change is usually caused by both external and internal factors: e.g. the Norman Conquest (external) brought about the introduction of many French loanwords (internal), which competed with native words. This competition sometimes led to lexical loss (e.g. OE *ea* was replaced by French *river*) or semantic change (e.g. OE *dēor* 'animal' > 'deer' when French *animal* and *beast* were introduced in the language) (internal).

1.2. Language change occurs at all levels

1.2.1. Levels of language

Language is a system divided into different levels or components.

- **Phonology** studies the sound system of a language, the different sounds (phonemes, allophones), their combinations and intonational patterns (prosody).
- **Morphology** deals with the form and the formation of words. Words are divided into morphemes, minimal units possessing meaning. Morphology can be divided into **derivational morphology**, which creates new words from existing words (e.g. *bake* vs. *baker*), and **inflectional morphology**, which creates new word-forms, marking grammatical distinctions (e.g. *baker* vs. *bakers*).
- **Syntax** is the study of the combinations of words, and how they are integrated into higher units (phrases, clauses, sentences), and how they are arranged (word-order). Morphology and syntax form grammar. Morphology and syntax are very closely interrelated: "[a]s the morphological complexity of English has been reduced, the syntactic component has expanded; grammatical distinctions that at an earlier stage were expressed by means of inflection have come to be expressed by using fixed word orders or by *periphrastic constructions*" (Brinton & Arnovik 2006: 6).
- **Semantics** is the study of meaning, both the intrinsic meaning of a word (denotation) and the associations it has (connotations). Lexical words have lexical meaning (e.g. *table* "a piece of furniture that consists of a flat top supported by legs" OALD s.v. *table* noun; hope "a belief that something you want will happen" OALD s.v. *hope* noun); function or grammatical words have relational meanings related to the grammar of the sentence (e.g. *this* "used to refer to a particular person, thing or event that is close to you, especially compared with another" OALD s.v. *this* determiner, pronoun).

- **Pragmatics** is the study of language in use; it deals with the functions of language in its social context. E.g. insults; study of politeness...etc.

[C]hanges occur in all of the components of a language over time. [...] changes in the vocabulary are the most obvious, but there have been equally extensive developments in the phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics of the English language. Furthermore, what happens in one component often entails substantial changes in the others. (Brinton & Arnovik 2006: 7-8)

There is some interaction between these different levels, so that change on one level can trigger change on other levels. (Burridge & Bergs 2017: 13)

1.2.2. Change in the different components

- **Lexical and semantic change** affects the vocabulary of a language and the semantics of vocabulary items.

  OE *eam* 'unvle' replaced by AF *uncle* > PDE *uncle* (borrowing)
  New words out of old words, e.g. *to text* (word formation, conversion)

  OE *brid* 'a young bird' > PDE *bird* 'any feathered vertebrate animal' (semantic change)

- **Pragmatic change**, i.e. changes of meaning in context. E.g. in the medieval period the use of religious terms (*God! Jesus!*) was very strong; no longer now. Nowadays racial terms are very offensive (n-word), while the word was originally neuter (just indicating a dark-skinned person).

- **Phonological and spelling changes**, i.e. those affecting the phonemes and allophones of a language, changes in stress, changes in the orthographical representation of sounds.

  OE *stān* /sta:n/ > ME *stone* /stɔ:n/
  OE *brōhte* ['bro:xte] > ME *brouʒte* /'brouxtə/ > PDE *brought* /brɔ:t/
  <h> <ʒ> <gh> for /x/

  pleasure /'pleʒə/ < /'plezjər/
  Caribbean /ˌkærɪˈbiːən/ vs. /kəˈrɪbiən/

  OE *cild* > ME *child*
  <c> and <ch> for /tʃ/

- **Morphological change**, that affecting the words and morphemes of a language.

  OE 3rd person plural pronouns *hie* 'they', *here* 'their', *heom* 'them' were replaced in ME times by *th*-forms.

Verb inflections have changed over time: OE *he singe<u>þ</u>* vs. PDE *he sing<u>s</u>*

- **Syntactic change**, i.e. change affecting the rules regulating the combinatory possibilities of words.

Why look you so upon me? (Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 3.5.69, c. 1600)
The King's statue is making by the Mercers Company (Pepys, *Diary*, 1660)

Activity: Analyse the following Early Modern English text from the point of view of a Present-day English speaker, and identify differences on the different levels of language (note that spelling has been modernized).

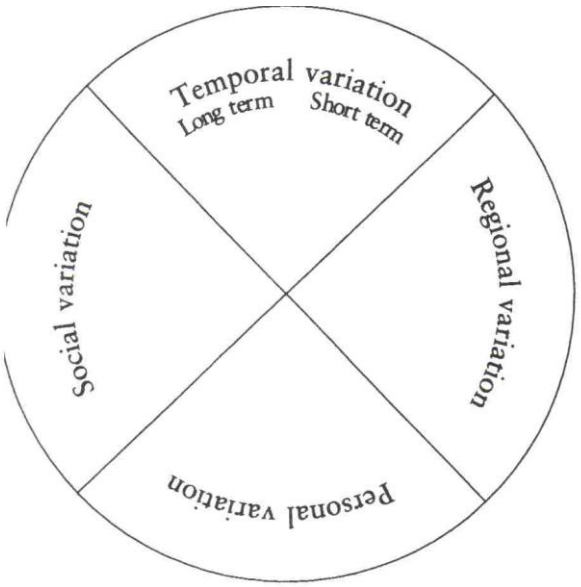
Is it thy will, thy image should keep open
My heavy eyelids to the weary night?
Dost thou desire my slumbers should be broken,
While shadows like to thee do mock my sight?
Is it thy spirit that thou send'st from thee
So far from home into my deeds to pry,
To find out shames and idle hours in me,
The scope and tenor of thy jealousy?
O, no! thy love, though much, is not so great:
It is my love that keeps mine eye awake:
Mine own true love that doth my rest defeat,
To play the watchman ever for thy sake:
For thee watch I, whilst thou dost wake elsewhere,
From me far off, with others all too near.

(1609, William Shakespeare, *Sonnet* 61)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfHW6Az9gYg>

1.3. Variation, change and evidence of change in progress.

Language is a very dynamic and variable activity. Variation may have different dimensions (cf. Crystal 1995: 3): (i) regional variation (depending on geographical area); (ii) social variation (social class, age, gender, etc.); (iii) personal variation (depending on context, interlocutors, etc.); and (iv) **temporal variation**, both in the short term and the long term.



.1 The dimensions of speech variation (from Crystal 1995: 3)

Sources of variation (Burridge & Bergs 2017: 14-18)

- Slight differences in production (e.g. in pronunciation) can be sources of variation.
- Imitation: speakers tend to accommodate, to adapt to our interlocutors (converging or diverging with them).
- Analogy: analogy is central to human cognition. E.g. *teach-teached* vs. *taught*.
- Language acquisition: children's language is not a perfect copy of that of their parents. Children learn language by abduction, from the input they receive, and they develop rules of language. Sometimes these rules "differ a little bit from those of the previous generations. These new rules then produce almost the same output as that of the previous generation, but every now and then these new rules might also lead to tiny innovations and to language variation" (Burridge & Bergs 2017: 15).
- Contact between different languages, dialects and accents. E.g. Spanish spoken in Galicia.
- 'Playfulness', speakers like to play with language, to invent new words, etc.

Language variation and language change are two sides of the same coin. Variation is a pre-requisite for change, and change may bring about synchronic variation.

[Language] change is, for want of a better phrase, quite 'messy' indeed. The processes we have considered may or may not occur, and if they do, do not affect the usage of all speakers, and certainly not at the same time. This means that change contributes to synchronic variation in a language system -old and new, and new and new variants may co-exist at any one time in a speech community. It also has diachronic effect -as some variants become dominant and are retained and others are lost, the 'linguistic character' of the language [...] also changes. (Singh 2005: 35-36)

Most changes ultimately go back to variation, but not all variation leads to linguistic change. There are cases of stable variation. E.g. [-in] vs. [-iŋ]

Bruce Springsteen's *Dancing in the dark* (1984)...is actually [dænsin] in the dark <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=129kuDCQtHs>
Sometimes the alveolar realization is reflected in spelling: *Waitin' on a sunny day* (2002). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TiCxqhu9cio>

In the past: evidence of confusion between these sounds and the variation is found in inverse spellings like <coming> for *cumin*, or <birthing> for *burden*, and rhymes <-ng> and <-n> <serpentyne: endyng> [-in]

1.4. Attitudes towards change

(a) Language change seen as decay.

> Tongues, like governments, have a natural tendency to degeneration. (1755. S. Johnson. Preface to his dictionary)

> Given the inevitability of linguistic change, attested to by the records of all know languages, why is this concept of deterioration so prevalent? One reason is our sense of nostalgia: we resist change of every kind, especially in a world that seems out of our control. […] A second reason is a concern for linguistic purity. Language may be the most overt indicator of our ethnic and national identity […] A third reason is social class prejudice. Standard English is the social dialect of the educated middle and upper-middle classes. To belong to these classes and to advance socially, one must speak this dialect. (Brinton & Arnovik 2006: 20-21).

> In a famous sociolinguistic study, Milroy and Milroy (1999) have identified a so-called complaint tradition. This tradition seems to reach back centuries, and it comprises two different aspects or complaint types, Type 1 complaints are rather "legalistic" and concerned with correctness. They "attack 'mis-use' of specific parts of the phonology, grammar, vocabulary" (1999: 31). Type 2 complaints are rather "moralistic" and "recommend clarity in writing and attack what appear to be abuses of language that may mislead and confuse the public" (ibid.). Both types of course interact and can feed into each other. What concerns us here is the fact that linguistic variation and change often lie at the heart of complaints of both types. [...] Many linguistic changes are perceived as decay, as loss of standards, norms and values. According to Milroy and Milroy (1999) this kind of decay is usually seen in tandem with a perceived (though maybe nonfactual) decline of culture and tradition. (Burridge & Bergs 2017: 21, 22)

(b) Language change seen as evolution.

Language is seen as an evolving organism. E.g. Otto Jespersen in his *Growth and structure of the English language* (1905) suggested that the move towards analyticity shown by English is a simplification and therefore an improvement.

(c) Language change: neither progress nor decay.

[L]anguage change represents the status quo, neither progress nor decay, where every simplification is balanced by some new complexity" (Brinton & Arnovik 2006: 21). This is the prevalent view of modern historical linguistics.

Needless to say, the job of linguists is not to be prescriptive in any sense; i.e. we do not evaluate whether particular changes are good or bad. Rather, linguists work descriptively and simply document whatever is happening in the language without evaluating this from a "right or wrong" perspective. For linguists, language is a natural (even if social) phenomenon, something that evolves and adapts and can be studied objectively. (Burridge & Bergs 2017: 22)

1.5. Internal history of the English language: an overview

1.5.1. Periodization

Old English (OE)	450-1150 Germanic invasions; earliest written records go back to around 700; Norman Conquest (1066) Subdivided into: Early OE (700-900) vs. Late OE (900-1150)
Middle English (ME)	1150-1500 Norman Conquest; Tudor dynasty (1485)/ printing press (1476, Westminster) Subdivided into: Early ME (1150-1350, the date of the birth of Chaucer) vs. Late ME (1350-1500).
Modern English (ModE)	1500→ Subdivided into: Early ModE (1500-1700); Late ModE (1700- 1900); Present-day English (PDE).

Traugott & Trousdale (2013: 43) establish a distinction between Modern English (1500-1970) and Present-day English (1970-present). They divide the Modern English period into Early Modern English (1500-1700) and Late Modern English (1700-1970).

Languages are in a constant state of flux, today just as in the past --even though we might not always notice it. [...] Languages do not change at a constant rate [...] There can be periods of speeding up and periods of slowing down. (Burridge & Bergs 2017: 4-5).

Languages may vary all the time, but they change in bursts. Lass (1997: 304)

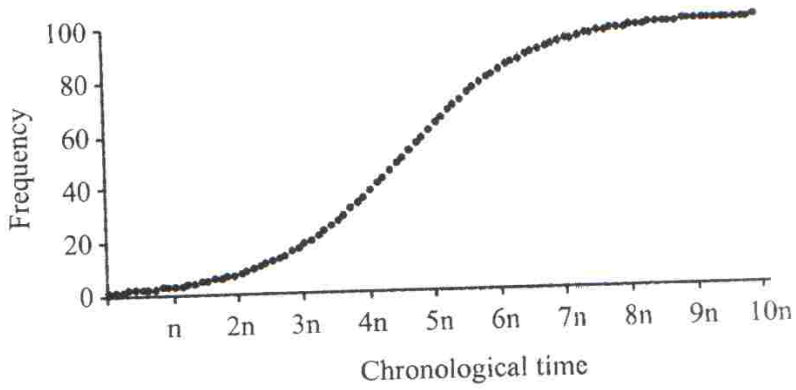


Figure 2.9 S-curve of linguistic change.

"Slow, slow, quick, slow" like a fox trot...
Recommended reading: Denison (1999).

1.5.2. Lexical and semantic changes

Change in the make-up of vocabulary: from a homogeneous language, purely Germanic, in the OE period, with important recourse to processes of word-formation and little borrowing, to a highly heterogeneous vocabulary, very hospitable to borrowings.

Lexical change: Lexical change, with losses and additions to the language is to be found in all periods, but there are some key periods of change:

Middle English → loss of many word-formation patterns found in Old English; loss of native vocabulary; massive borrowing from Old Norse, French and Latin. Levels of vocabulary (formal > informal) depending on origin of words (Latin > French > Native).

Early Modern English → experimentation with word-formation and borrowing: English needs the vocabulary of a developed language. Borrowing from all languages word-wide

Late Modern English → scientific language; neoclassical compounds. Borrowing from all languages world-wide.

Semantics: change is continuous.

1.5.3. Changes in pronunciation

There have been important sound changes in all periods.

Late Old English → weakening of unstressed vowels; monophthongization of diphthongs...

Middle English → new diphthongs; quantitative changes in vowels; phonemic splits in fricatives...

Early Modern English → The Great Vowel Shift!

Late Modern English → loss of postvocalic /r/; *path*, *bus*...

There are important sound changes happening right now! e.g. changes in vocalism taking place in Northern North American cities (Northern Cities Chain Shift, see Brinton & Arnovik 2006: 425).

1.5.4. Morphological change

Late Old English and Early Middle English are key, especially in noun morphology.

Middle English is also central in the loss of verb inflections.

Drift strong > weak verbs, change "under construction" (*mow*, *mowed*, *mown/mowed*, etc.)

1.5.5. Syntactic change

Old and Middle English → changes in word order, emergence of verbal periphrases...

Early and Late Modern English → important changes in the verb system (modal verbs, progressive, get-passive...)

Changes in argument structure over the whole period → tendency towards transitivization (way-construction, cognate object-construction, reaction object construction...).

1.5.6. Pragmatic change

Not linked with a particular period, but Early and Late Modern English, change in politeness, from positive politeness > negative politeness (e.g. direct vs. indirect requests; use of modals; use of politeness markers *pray* vs. *please*).

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