ENG423A:Current Trends in Linguistics

Explaining Language Change

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Language Change

Coin brassy words at will, debase the coinage;
We're in an if-you-cannot-lick-them-join age,
A slovenliness provides its own excuse age,
Where usage overnight condones misusage,
Farewell, farewell to my beloved language,
Once English, now a vile orangutanguage.

(Ogden Nash, *Laments for a Dying Language.* 1962)

What is language change?

- Change in language is inevitable
- All languages change all the time (except dead ones).
- The changes going on today which so distress some in our society are exactly the same in kind and character as many past changes about which there was much complaint and worry as they were taking place but the results of which today are considered enriching aspects of the modem language.
- The area of linguistics that investigates change through time is known as *diachronic linguistics* –from Greek *dia-* 'through' + *chronos* 'time' *+-ic*
- *Synchorny* is the view at a given point of time.

- **Historical linguistics** is dedicated to the study of 'how' and 'why' languages change, both to the methods of investigating linguistic change and to the theories designed to explain these changes.
- **Philology**- the study of the history of a single language.
- **Comparative linguistics-** study changes revealed in the comparison of related language.
- **Etymology**- word histories
    - For example – glamour, sugar, shampoo

Internal vs External change

- Language change can basically be assigned to one of two types:

1) The change is caused by structural realignments through reanalysis, mostly during first language acquisition — this is internally motivated change.

2) The change results from the linguistic behaviour of teenage and adult speakers in their community, — this is externally motivated change.

Kinds of linguistic changes

- Any aspect of a language's structure can change
- Lexical change – putri- beti
- Grammatical change – gender system
- Sound change – pakshi- pakhi – panchi
- Borrowing – technological terminology
- Semantic changes – fan, gay
- Changes in orthography – nasal sounds in modern Indo-Aryan languages

Examples of language change

“Doubt thou the stars are fire;
Doubt that the sun doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar;
But never doubt I love.”
— **William Shakespeare, Hamlet**

Examples of language change

“Bada hua to kya hua, jaise ped khajoor
Panthi ko chhaya nahi, phal laage ati door”

Kabir Das

Sound change

- Perhaps the most thoroughly studied area of language change.
- It is often the main feature of books on the history of individual languages.
- Sound changes are usually classified according to whether they are *regular* or *sporadic.*
- *Sporadic* changes affect only one or a few words, and do not apply generally throughout the language; that is, a change is considered sporadic if we cannot predict which words in a language it will affect.
- *Regular* changes recur generally and take place uniformly wherever the phonetic circumstances in which the change happens are encountered. In fact, the most important basic assumption in historical linguistics is that sound change is regular.

Sound change

- Sound changes are also typically classified according to whether they are *unconditioned* or *conditioned.*
- When a sound change occurs generally and is not dependent on the phonetic context in which it occurs, that is, not dependent on or restricted in any way by neighbouring sounds, it is *unconditioned.*
  - *ʃ ~ s*
- When a change takes place only in certain contexts (when it is dependent upon neighbouring sounds, upon the sound's position within words, or on other aspects of the grammar), it is *conditioned.*
  - *Nasalisation*

Types of sound change

Assimilation

- Assimilation means that one sound becomes more similar to another, a change in a sound brought about by the influence of a neighbouring, usually adjacent, sound.
- Assimilatory changes are very common, probably the most frequent and most important category of sound changes.
- Assimilatory changes are classified in terms of the three intersecting dichotomies *total-partial, contact-distant* and *regressive-progressive*. These three parameters of classification interact with one another to give the following combinations of named changes.

- A change is *total* assimilation if a sound becomes identical to another by taking on all of its phonetic features.
- The change is *partial* if the assimilating sound acquires some traits of another, but does not become fully identical to it.
- A *regressive (anticipatory)* change is one in which the sound that undergoes the change comes earlier in the word (nearer the beginning, more to the left) than the sound which causes or conditions the assimilation. *Progressive* changes affect sounds which come later in the word than (closer to the end than, to the right of) the conditioning environment.
- Latin *octo*> Italian *otto* 'eight', *noctem* > *notte* 'night', *factum*> *fatto* 'done'. The *k* (spelled c) is before Ito the left of the *t* which conditions it to change; thus the change is *regressive.* The *k* is immediately adjacent to the *t,* meaning that this is a *contact* change. And, the *k* assumes all the features of the conditioning *t,* becoming itself a *t,* meaning that the assimilation is *total.*

Dissimilation, the opposite of assimilation, is change in which sounds become less similar to one another.

- Assimilation is far more common than dissimilation; assimilation is usually regular, general throughout the language, though sometimes it can be sporadic. Dissimilation is much rarer.
- *Grassmann s Law,* a famous sound change in Indo-European linguistics, is a case of regular dissimilation in Greek and Sanskrit where in roots with two aspirated stops the first dissimilates to an unaspirated stop.
- These are voiced aspirated stops in Sanskrit and voiceless aspirated stops in Greek:
  - Sanskrit *bhabhuva* > *babhuva* 'became' (reduplication of root *bhu-)*
  - Greek *phephuka* > *pephuka* 'converted' (reduplication of *phil-* 'to engender').

Deletions

- *Syncope (atata > atta)*
- The loss (deletion) of a vowel from the interior of a word (not initially or finally) is called *syncope.*
- Apocope (from Greek *apokope* 'a cutting off', *apo-* 'away' + *kope* 'cut, beat') refers to the loss (apocopation, deletion) of a sound, usually a vowel, at the end of a word, said to be 'apocopated'. Apocope is a frequently used term. Ex: sahaj, kamal
- Aphaeresis (from Greek *aphairesis* 'a taking away') refers to changes which delete the initial sound (usually a vowel) of a word. Aphaeresis can be regular or sporadic.
- Spanish dialects show many cases of sporadic aphaeresis: *caso* < *acaso* 'perhaps, by chance'; *piscopal* < *episcopal* 'episcopal'; *ahora* > *hora* 'now'

Epenthesis inserts a sound into a word. *(Epenthesis* is from Greek *epi'* in addition' + *en* 'in' + *thesis* 'placing'.)

- Compensatory lengthening (tast > ta:t)
- In changes of compensatory lengthening, something is lost and another segment, usually a vowel, is lengthened, as the name implies, to compensate for the loss.

Proto-Celtic	*magl	*kenetl	*etn	*datl
Old Irish	ma:l	cene:l	e:n	da:l
	'prince'	'kindred',	'gender'	'bird'

- (Arlotto 1972: 89)

- **Metathesis** (from Greek *metatesis* 'transposition, change of sides') is the transposition of sounds; it is a change in which sounds exchange positions with one another within a word. Most instances of metathesis are sporadic changes, but metathesis can also be a regular change.
- **Haplology** (from Greek *haplo-* 'simple, single') is the name given to the change in which a repeated sequence of sounds is simplified to a single occurrence.
  - English *humbly* was *humblely* in Chaucer's time, pronounced with three syllables, but has been reduced to two syllables (only one *l)* in modem standard English.

Relative chronology

- A sound change pertains to a particular period of time in the history of the language in which it takes place.
- This means that some sound changes may take place in the language at some earlier stage and then cease to be active, whereas others may take place at some later stage in the language's history.
- Often in the case of different changes from different times, evidence is left behind which provides us with the clues with which to determine their relative chronology, that is, the temporal order in which they took place.

	Sanskrit	*Latin*	*English*
*bh > b	bhrā́tar bhára-	frāter fer- (f < *bh)	brother bear
*dh > d	dhā-	facere (f < dh)	do, did, deed
*gh > g	haṃsa (<*gh)	(h)anser	goose

Borrowing

- It is common for one language to take words from another language and make them part of its own vocabulary: these are called *loanwords* and the process is called linguistic *borrowing*.
- Borrowing, however, is not restricted to just lexical items taken from one language into another; any linguistic material - sounds, phonological rules, grammatical morphemes, syntactic patterns, semantic associations, discourse strategies or whatever - which has its origin in a foreign language can be borrowed.
- Borrowing normally implies a certain degree of bilingualism for at least some people in both the language which borrows and the language which is borrowed from.

What are loanwords?

- A loanword is a lexical item (a word) which has been 'borrowed' from another language, a word which originally was not part of the vocabulary of the recipient language but was adopted from some other language and made part of the borrowing language's vocabulary.
- rice < ultimately from Dravidian **ari/*ariki* 'rice, paddy' (compare Tamil *ari/ari-ci),* via Latin *oriza* and Greek *oruza.*
- Juggernaut, cummerbund

Why are words borrowed?

- Languages borrow words from other languages primarily because of *need* and *prestige.*
- When speakers of a language acquire some new item or concept from abroad, they *need* a new term to go along with the new acquisition; often a foreign name is borrowed along with the new concept.
- This explains, for example, why so many languages have similar words for 'coffee' (Russian *kofe,* Finnish *kahvi,* Japanese *kohii).*
- The other main reason why words are taken over from another language is for *prestige,* because the foreign term for some reason is highly esteemed. Borrowings for prestige are sometimes called 'luxury' loans.
- Example: *papa*
- Borrowed words are usually remodelled to fit the phonological and morphological structure of the borrowing language, at least in early stages of language contact.

What aspects of language can be borrowed and how?

- There are many different kinds of language-contact situations, and the outcome of borrowing can vary according to the length and intensity of the contact, the kind of interaction, and the degree of bilingualism in the populations.
- In situations of more extensive, long term or intimate contact, new phonemes can be introduced into the borrowing language together with borrowed words which contain these new sounds, resulting in changes in the phonemic inventory of the borrowing language; this is sometimes called *direct phonological diffusion.*
- For example, before intensive contact with Farsi, Hind(ustan)i had no phonemic /ʒ/.
- The phonological patterns (phonotactics, syllable or morpheme structure) of a language can also be altered by the acceptance in more intimate language contact of loans which do not conform to native patterns.

Methods for determining that something is a loanword and for identifying the source languages

- The strongest evidence for loanword identification and the direction of borrowing comes from phonological criteria.
- (1) Phonological patterns of the language. Words containing sounds which are not normally expected in native words are candidates for loans.
- (2) Phonological history. In some cases where the phonological history of the languages of a family is known, information concerning the sound changes that they have undergone can be helpful for determining loans, the direction of borrowing, and what the donor language was.

- The morphological make-up of words can help determine the direction of borrowing. In cases of borrowing, when the form in question in one language is morphologically complex (composed of two or more morphemes) or has an etymology which is morphologically complex, but the form in the other languages has no morphological analysis, then usually the donor language is the one with the morphologically complex form and the borrower is the one with the monomorphemic form.
- For example, English *alligator* is borrowed from Spanish *el lagarto* ‘the alligator'; since it is monomorphemic in English, but based on two morphemes in Spanish, *el* 'the' + *lagarto* 'alligator', the direction of borrowing must be from Spanish to English.

- When a word in two (or more) languages is suspected of being borrowed, if it has legitimate cognates (with regular sound correspondences) across sister languages of one family, but is found in only one language (or a few languages) of another family, then the donor language is usually one of the languages for which the form in question has cognates in the related languages.
- Spanish *ganso* 'goose' is borrowed from Germanic **gans;* Germanic has cognates, for example German *Gans,* English *goose,* and so on, but other Romance languages have no true cognate of Spanish *ganso.* Rather, they have such things as French *oie,* Italian *oca.*
- The geographical and ecological associations of words suspected of being loans can often provide information helpful to determining whether they are borrowed and what the identity of the donor language is. For example, the geographical and ecological remoteness from earlier English-speaking territory of *zebra, gnu, impala* and *aardvark* – animals originally found only in Africa - makes these words likely candidates for loanwords in English.

Calques (loan translations, semantic loans)

- In loanwords, something of both the phonetic form and meaning of the word in the donor language is transferred to the borrowing language, but it is also possible to borrow, in effect, just the meaning, and instances of this are called *calques* or *loan translations*.
- *Doordarshan, gagan sakhi*

Analogical change

- In analogical change, one piece of the language changes to become more like another pattern in the language where speakers perceive the changing part as similar to the pattern that it changes to be more like.
- Analogy is sometimes described as 'internal borrowing', the idea being that in analogical change a language may 'borrow' from some of its own patterns to change other patterns.
- Analogy is usually not conditioned by regular phonological factors, but rather depends on aspects of the grammar, especially morphology.

Proportional vs non-proportional analogy

- Traditionally, two major kinds of analogical changes have been distinguished, *proportional* and *non-proportional,* although the distinction is not always clear or relevant.
- Proportional analogical changes are those which can be represented in an equation of the form, a : b = c : x, where one solves for 'x' - *a* is to *b* as c is to what? *(x* = 'what?'). For example: *ride: rode* = *dive: x,* where in this instance *x* is solved with *dove.*
- Today, both *dived* and *dove* are considered acceptable in Standard English, though the use of these forms does vary regionally.

Analogical levelling vs extension

- Many of the proportional analogical changes are instances of analogical levelling.
- Analogical levelling reduces the number of allomorphs a form has; it makes paradigms more uniform.
- In analogical levelling, forms which formerly underwent alternations no longer do so after the change.
- For example, some English 'strong' verbs have been levelled to the 'weak' verb pattern, as for instance in dialects where *throw/threw/ thrown* has become *throw/throwed/throwed.*
- *Once-twice-…….*
- Analogical extension (somewhat rarer than analogical levelling) extends the already existing alternation of some pattern to new forms which did not formerly undergo the alternation. An example of analogical extension is seen in the case mentioned earlier of *dived* being replaced by *dove* on analogy with the 'strong' verb pattern as in *drive/drove, ride/rode* and so on, an extension of the alternating pattern of the strong verbs.

- The relationship between sound change and analogy is captured reasonably well by the slogan (sometimes called 'Sturtevant's paradox'): *sound change is regular and causes irregularity; analogy is irregular and causes regularity* (Anttila 1989: 94).

Other Kinds of *Analogy*

- Many different kinds of change are typically called analogy; some of these have little in common with one other.
- It is important to have a general grasp of these various kinds of changes which are all lumped together under the general heading of analogy.
- 1) **Hypercorrection** involves awareness of different varieties of speech which are attributed different social status. An attempt to change a form in a less prestigious variety to make it conform with how it would be pronounced in a more prestigious variety sometimes results in overshooting the target and coming up with what is an erroneous outcome from the point of view of the prestige variety being mimicked.
- Example: Use of aspirated sounds in Dravidian languages – mitti~mitthi as an analogy of mitha

- 2) We might think of **folk etymologies** as cases where linguistic imagination finds meaningful associations in the linguistic forms which were not originally there and, on the basis of these new associations, either the original form ends up being changed somewhat or new forms based on it are created.
- An often-cited example is that of English *hamburger,* whose tru etymology is from German *Hamburg* + *-er,* 'someone or something from the city of Hamburg'; while hamburgers are not made of 'ham'. Speakers have folk-etymologised *hamburger* as having something to do with *ham* and on this basis have created such new forms as *cheeseburger, chiliburger, fishburger….*

- In **back formation** *(retrograde* formation, a type of *folk etymology),* a word is assumed to have a morphological composition which it did not originally have, usually a root plus affixes, so that when the affixes are removed, a new root is created.
- A number of new English verb roots have been created by back formations based on associations of something in the fonn of the original noun root with a variant of *-er* 'someone who does the action expressed in the verb': *to burgle* based on *burglar; to edit* from *editor; to escalate* based on *escalator, to letch* from *lecher; to orate* backformed from *orator; to peddle* based on *pedlar; to sculpt* from *sculptor.*
- Traditionally two things are treated under the title of **metanalysis**, *amalgamation* and *metanalysis proper* (today more often called *reanalysis).* As the name suggests, metanalysis involves a change in the structural analysis, in the interpretation of which phonological material goes with which morpheme in a word or construction.
- *adder* is from Old English *nreddre;* the change came about through a reinterpretation (reanalysis) of the article-noun sequence *a* + *nreddre* as *an* + *adder.*

- In **blends**, pieces of two (or more) different words are combined to create new words. Usually the words which contribute the pieces that go into the make-up of the new word are semantically related in some way, sometimes as synonyms for things which have the same or a very similar meaning.
- Often-cited examples include: *smog < smoke + fog; brunch < breakfast + lunch; motel < motor + hotel, splatter < splash + spatter; flush <flash + blush*.

Syntactic change

- The study of syntactic change is currently an extremely active area of historical linguistics. Nevertheless, there has been no generally recognised approach to the treatment of syntactic change, such as there is for sound change.
- There are only three *mechanisms* of syntactic change: *reanalysis, extension* and *borrowing.*

Reanalysis

- Reanalysis changes the underlying structure of a syntactic construction, but does not modify surface manifestation.
- The *underlying structure* includes (1) constituency, (2) hierarchical structure, (3) grammatical categories, (4) grammatical relations and (5) cohesion.
- *Surface manifestation* includes (1) morphological marking (for example, morphological case, agreement, gender) and (2) word order.
- An important axiom of reanalysis is *reanalysis depends on the possibility of more than one analysis of a given construction.*
- *Example : mujhe do kele do.*

Extension

- Extension results in changes in surface manifestation, but does not involve immediate modification of underlying structure.

Borrowing

- Borrowing of sentence structures from neighbouring languages
- Relative –corelative in Kannada
- U:ta mugisidavarige sihi kodi – original
- Give sweets to the one who finishes the meal.
- Yaru u:ta mugisuttaro avarige sihi kodi - borrowed
- Jo khana khatam karega use mithai do
- Whoever finishes the meal, give the sweets to him.

Grammaticalisation

- This process is often characterised by a concurrent 'weakening' of both the meaning and the phonetic form of the word involved.
- In grammaticalisation, two related processes are the typical objects of investigations:

(1) changes of the lexical-item-to-grammatical-morpheme sort, which can involve phonological reduction and exhibit change from independent word to clitic or affix; and

(2) the discourse-structure-to-morphosyntactic-marking sort, the fixing of discourse strategies in syntactic and morphological structure.

(Traugott and Heine 1991: 2)

- In both kinds, grammaticalisation is typically associated with *semantic bleaching* and *phonological reduction.* *Eg:* will (I'll, she'll), go

Semantic Change

- Changes in meaning and vocabulary
- Example: *avakash* – Hindi vs Kannada; bloody, bugger, pissed – British vs American English
- Those who learn other languages often ask how true cognates can come to have such different meanings in related languages, as in the English-German cognates *town/Zaun* 'fence', *timber/ Zimmer* 'room', *bone/Bein* 'leg', *writelreissen* 'to tear, rip’.

Types of semantic change

- In semantic changes involving **widening**, the range of meanings of a word increases so that the word can be used in more contexts than were appropriate for it before the change.
    - *Salary.* Latin *saliirium* was a soldier's allotment of salt (based on Latin *sal* 'salt'), which then came to mean a soldier's wages in general, and then finally, as in English, wages in general, not just a soldier's pay.
- In semantic **narrowing**, the range of meanings is decreased so that a word can be used appropriately only in fewer contexts than it could before the change.
- *Girl,* which meant 'child or young person of either sex' in Middle English times, narrowed its referent in Modem English to 'a female child, young woman'.
- **Metaphor** in semantic change involves extensions in the meaning of a word that suggest a semantic similarity or connection between the new sense and the original one.
- English *stud* 'good-looking, sexy man' of slang origin, derived by metaphor from *stud* 'a male animal (especially a horse) used for breeding'.

- **Metonymy** (from Greek *metonomia* 'transfonnation of the name') is a change in the meaning of a word so that it comes to include additional senses which were not originally present but which are closely associated with the word's original meaning, although the conceptual association between the old and new meanings may lack precision. Metonymic changes typically involve some contiguity in the real (non-linguistic) world.
- Hindi *terv(a/i)* – death related rituals
- English *flake* 'irresponsible person' of slang origin is by metonymy from the original meaning of *flake* 'a small, loose, flat bit'.
- **Synecdoche** (from Greek *sunekdokhe* 'inclusion'), often considered a kind of metonymy, involves a part-to-whole relationship, where a term with more comprehensive meaning is used to refer to a less comprehensive meaning or vice versa; that is, a part (or quality) is used to refer to the whole, or the whole is used to refer to part, for example *hand,* which was extended to include also 'hired hand, employed worker'.
- Some common examples found in various languages are 'tongue' > 'language', 'sun' > 'day', 'moon' > 'month'.

- In **degeneration** (often called *pejoration),* the sense of a word takes on a less positive, more negative evaluation in the minds of the users of the language - an increasingly negative value judgement.
  - Hindi *balatkaar* – use of force> rape
- Semantic changes of **elevation** (amelioration) involve shifts in the sense of a word in the direction towards a more positive value in the minds of the users of the language - an increasingly positive value judgement.
  - Spanish *casa* 'house' < Latin *casa* 'hut, cottage'.
- **Taboo and euphemisms:** There are cases of lexical replacement where a meaning remains but the phonetic realisation of it is changed in some way, usually by substituting some other lexical item which had other denotations of its own before the change.
  - Voldermort > he-who-should-not-be-named; private body parts and their functions

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