Ottenheimer Chapter 9

Change and Choice
How (and Why) Languages Change

Overview

All living languages change
• Change affects all parts of language: Phonology, morphology, semantics, orthography.
• Change can come from within or from contact: Mechanisms of drift, borrowing, pidgins, creoles.
• Change can be welcomed or resisted: Multilingualism, diglossia, nationalism, endangered languages.

Understanding change allows us to: 1) Discover relationships between languages; 2) reconstruct ancient languages; and 3) address issues of language, dialect, and identity.

Sometimes changes in language stick and sometimes they do not.
1. One example of a language sticking is by coining new terms:
   • Spam (Spiced hAM luncheon meat).
   • How about refudiate (repudiate and refute of Sarah Palin fame)?
2. Another common way is meaning-shift:
   • Bogus changed from meaning ‘false’ to meaning ‘cool’.
   • At one time up-tight meant ‘cool’, now it means ‘tense about correctness’.
   • Terrific once meant ‘full of terror’ now it is ‘superlatively good’.
3. A third way language changes is by social pressure; often in response to an attempt to set oneself apart as unique.
   • Prestige: Shifting to (r) in NY after WWII (Labov).
   • Novelty: bits, bytes, e-mail, mp3, imho, ‘sup.
   • Identity: locals vs tourists - vowels in Cape Cod.
   • Contact: need to communicate for trade. In the Solomons, the pidgin word for money is “seleni”; it is derived from the British word “shilling”. Also, the word for woman is “mere” from Mary (religious reference).
How (and Why) Languages Change 2

- How languages change
  - In general, linguists talk of two ways that languages change: external change and internal change.
  - External change refers to changes due to language contact and borrowing between speakers of different languages.
  - Internal change refers to the modification of language by the native speakers, over time.

- External change
  - Words are the most easily borrowed items between languages.
    - Some languages tend to resist borrowing.
    - English tends to the opposite, and lots of borrowing goes on. For instance, tomato, potato, coyote, pajama, robot, safari, beisbol are all borrowed.
    - These borrowed words are called **loanwords**.
  - Over time these loanwords spread throughout the larger community (a process called conventionalization) and are then “owned” by the community.
    - Rouge, garage, au jus came from French to English.
    - Hot dog and computer added to French from English.

- Common ways external change works:
  1. **The way the word is pronounced** can either be a careful sounding of the original, or it can be filtered through the native sound system. One example of this is garage: American [ʒ] borrowed from French (the soft g in garage), but British English retained [dʒ].
  2. Another way of word borrowing is to **change the meaning of the borrowed words**. For example, *au jus* in French means ‘with gravy’ but in American English it now means gravy so we say ‘with au jus’.
External change (continued)

Common ways external change works:
3. Yet another way is to change the way that plurals are made of the words borrowed,
   - The KiSwahili singular is safari (and so is the plural) or alternatively, zifsafari.
   - But in English the plural becomes safaris.
   - This process is called regularization; other examples are dived, fishes, agendas, auditoriums.
4. Sometimes people reanalyze the words they borrow. Reanalysis is the process of analyzing (or misanalyzing) unfamiliar words into familiar ones, such as through redivision:
   - Hamburger (of Hamburger) became ham+burger, in that the word ham was familiar.
   - Now veggieburger, chickenburger, and so forth.

Internal change

Internal change tends to be a slower process than external change.
Further, it tends to be more predictable as it uses existing structural patterns in a language.
Common ways internal change works:
1. Pronoun shift is one example of this structural pattern change and is an example of loss (and replacement):
   - An example of this is the introduction of they, them and their (third person pronouns) in place of third person singular pronouns of he/she, him/her and his/her.
   - Predicted as thee, thou and thy had already been replaced by you/your.
   - Another example is the introduction of youse and y’all for second person plural, in spite of their former labeling as uneducated or ‘old South.
How (and Why) Languages Change 4

• Internal change (continued)
  • Common ways internal change works:
    2. Another change is by **misanalysis** in a predictable way:
      • Napron becomes an apron.
      • Another becomes a nother.
      • Could’ve is becoming could of.
    3. New concepts are also the source of new words
      • **Computer speak**: In blog, the log is being used for phone log or photo log \(\rightarrow\) (phlog); Moblog is derived from (mobile phone log); Vlog is from video log.
      • Data smog (smoke + fog) is coined as ‘too much information’.
      • E-mail \(\rightarrow\) email \(\rightarrow\) elog, and so other e-words.
      • ATM \(\rightarrow\) ATM machine even though the M stands for machine.
      • One of my personal favorites is the MADTV parody called: iRACK.
      • New words are “legitimized” when they appear in the OED (Oxford English Dictionary). See this link for a list of some of the **most recent additions**.
        • In 2001, the term **McJob** was added to the OED. It refers to any low paid job where one has no chance for advancement.
        • **Crowdfunding** was added in 2015.
    4. Sometimes morphemes can be analyzed into completely new words:
      • Don’t dis me (from disrespect).
      • Surely, I can \(\rightarrow\) Sure, I can.
Internal change (continued)

Common ways internal change works (continued):

5. Other ways that words change internally:
   - Narrowing: ‘deer’ once meant any small animal; corn used to mean any grain
   - Expansion: box meant specific wood box.
   - Shortening: dorm, exam, prof.

6. Spelling can be a source of change:
   - Symbol shift: <ǐ> [θ] and <ḍ> [ð] both replaced by <th>
   - Spelling shift: <colour> changed to <color> and <light> changing to <lite>
   - Borrowed spellings: <debt> borrowed from Latin; Old English spelling was <dette>.

7. Sounds also change over time, but this is even a slower process than word change internally.
   - Assimilation (from Wikipedia): Linguistic process by which a sound becomes similar to an adjacent sound such as illegal, immoral, irresponsible.
   - Dissimilation (from Wikipedia): Phenomenon whereby similar consonant sounds in a word have a tendency to become different over time, so as to ease pronunciation): Febyuary, English vowel shift OR from [a:] to [o] stone went from staːn to ston.
   - Elision: Omission of one or more sounds, vowel, consonant or syllable [cloðz] to [kloz]
   - Metathesis (from Wikipedia): A sound change that alters the order of phonemes in a word: æsk to æks.
Misperceptions about language change
• One misperception is that languages spoken by a small number people, in relative isolation will change more slowly.
• Another misperception is that written languages will change more slowly, or that the change will be in the spoken language much more so.

From language to dialect
• A language split into two or more varieties is called a **dialect**. Remember, they are mutually intelligible.
• The changes that lead to different dialects can be fairly unpredictable, depending on where groups end up and the internal and external influences Examples:
  • American English is filled with American Indian words, but not British English. American English retained the word ‘period’ but British English changed to ‘full-stop’
• Quotes:
  • George Bernard Shaw quote: “England and America are two countries separated by a common language.”
  • Clarence Darrow quote: Even if you do learn to speak correct English, whom are you going to speak it to? “
  • Dave Kellett quote: “The English language was carefully, carefully cobbled together by three blind dudes and a German dictionary.”
  • Doug Larson quote; “If the English language made any sense, a catastrophe would be an apostrophe with fur.”
• From dialect to language
  • British English and American English are referred to as related dialects: dialects where one can trace their common origins.
  • Related languages are also derived from a common origin, but more distantly, in that they are produced from related dialects.
    • For either these dialects or languages may not want to understand each other.
    • Example: Ukrainian and Russian.

• Examples of language change
  • Languages change structurally, socially, and ideologically
  • Further, there can be stages in a language, such as Old English, Middle English, and modern English.
    • Perhaps the most famous Old English text is Beowulf.
    • The most famous of Middle English works are those of Shakespeare.
    • English Great Vowel Shift (GVS)
      • The way that vowels were pronounced began changing in the 1400s during the shift from Old to Middle English) and continued to change into the 1700s.
      • See the chart on the next page for more specifics and Table 9.1 (this is an illustration of the Great Vowel Shift).
      • This page can be used to see and hear the changes (which happened is a series of steps).
Figure 9.1: English Great Vowel Shift (GVS)
The Impact of Language Change 3

- **Language change and language families**
  - Languages descended from common ancestors.
    - A family of languages is a set of languages thought to have descended (developed) from a common ancestor. These language families are also refer to them as genetically related languages (not the biological sense).
    - Are considered ‘families’ with mother languages and daughter languages.
    - Daughter languages are derived mother languages.
  - Family trees of languages.
    - show branches and sub-branches; Each branch, then, can be traced back.
    - English is a member of the Indo-European family of languages.
      - Also called Proto-IndoEuropean or PIE)
      - So how did IndoEuropean sound?: [Listen here](#).

- **Language ‘isolates’**
  - Are considered sole survivors of ancient families.
  - Examples include Nahali (India) and Basque languages, Navajo is a “near isolate”.
  - Some became isolates as they are in the process of going extinct.
  - Are considered unique, and are difficult to classify.

- **Historical linguistics**
  - Historical linguistics studies the long-term variation of speech by studying protolanguages and daughter languages.
  - Anthropologists are interested in historical linguistics because cultural features sometimes correlate with the distribution of language families.
The Impact of Language Change

- **Language as mostly static**
  - Historical linguistics was the primary approach prior to the 20th century in linguistics.
  - There was often the view that certain languages (Greek and Latin) were superior to others (English or French).
  - There was little interest in the dynamic changes in languages until the 19th century.
  - This shift represents a powerful understanding of the relationship between language and culture.

- **The scientific look at language change**
  - The biblical explanation for language diversity was the story of the Tower of Babel.
  - The idea that languages had common words was not unknown.
  - These similarities were explained by the borrowing of words and not as a result of linguistic descent.
  - The Romance languages were recognized as similar to Latin, but again this was seen as mostly due to borrowing.
  - A scientific explanation was first introduced in the late-1700s by Sir William Jones.
  - Jones was sent to Calcutta, India in the role of a colonial judge for the British East India Company. He was also trained as a linguist.
  - He was to be a supervisor of the Hindu courts. But, how could he supervise if one did not read Sankrit?
  - Jones learned this language. As a result of his studies he was the first linguist to suggest the concept of ‘common descent’: That languages are related to each other via ancestral language.
  - Want more information? Listen to this podcast: [The History of English: Episode 2: The Indo-European discovery](#)
The Impact of Language Change

- **Language change and language families**
- Reconstructing protolanguages (mother languages).
  - How to find the original sound? By using the daughter languages to reconstruct the mother language(s).
- If languages split apart related languages will be similar to one another.
  - Irish ‘do’ Welsh ‘dau’ Greek ‘duo’ Latin ‘duo’.
  - Italian ‘due’ Spanish ‘dos’ French ‘deux’ German ‘zwei’.
  - Dutch ‘twee’ Swedish ‘tva’ Danish ‘to’ Old English ‘twa’.
  - Polish ‘dwie’ Russian ‘dva’ Bengal ‘dvi’ Persian ‘do’.
  - Lithuanian ‘du’ Albanian ‘dy’…
- Conclusion: [d], [t], [dv] [tv], and [dz] all descended from same sound.
  - Here is a table comparing numbers.
  - Here is a table comparing a set of words.
- Indo-European is the focus of much work as it is a written language and the cognates that can be documented:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>flesh</td>
<td>Fleisch</td>
<td>chair/viand (flesh &amp; Fleisch are cognates)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beef</td>
<td>Rindfleisch</td>
<td>boeuf (beef borrowed from French)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>calf</td>
<td>Kalbe</td>
<td>veau (calf &amp; Kalbe are cognates)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>veal</td>
<td>Kalbfleisch</td>
<td>veau (veal borrowed from French)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swine</td>
<td>Schwein</td>
<td>porc (swine &amp; Schwein are cognates)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pork</td>
<td>Schweinefleisch</td>
<td>porc (pork borrowed from the French)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Impact of Language Change

- Language change and language families (continued)
- Reconstructing protolanguage
  - One method is use what is called **phonetic plausibility strategy** (use what is most plausible based on what is known about the way languages change):
    1. Includes use of **palatalization** as common change (moving the articulation closer to the palate)
    2. **Assimilation**: moving the sound closer to that of a neighboring sound
  - A classic example of this is evidenced by **Grimm’s Law** (the sound shifts that occurred as Proto-IndoEuropean (PIE) moved into Proto-Germanic).
  - Steps in reconstructing protolanguage using the **majority rules strategy** (if no phonetically plausible reason, go with frequency):
    - **Step 1**: Identify **cognates** (as opposed to borrowings) in the languages. Cognates will have similar meanings & sounds:
      - e.g., German ‘zwei’ and English ‘two’; German ‘zehn’ and English ‘ten’
      - e.g., Maori ‘tapu’, Hawaiian ‘kapu’, Samoan ‘tapu’ and Fijian ‘tabu’.
    - **Step 2**: Develop a table of **correspondence sets** (sets of sounds that appear to correspond to each other).
    - **Step 3**: Use the correspondence sets to reconstruct the ancestral phonemes (proto-phonemes).
    - **Step 4**: Chart the ancestral sounds
      - Consonants: *p & *t
      - Vowels: *u & *a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maori</th>
<th>Hawaiian</th>
<th>Samoan</th>
<th>Fijian</th>
<th>Proto-Polynesian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>*t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>*a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>*p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>*u</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Grimm’s Law

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indo-European</th>
<th>Germanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[p, t, k]</td>
<td>[f, θ, h]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pater</td>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tres</td>
<td>three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>centum [kentum]</td>
<td>hundred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[b, d, g]</td>
<td>[p, t, k]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>labium</td>
<td>lip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>duo</td>
<td>two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genus</td>
<td>kin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[bh, dh, gh]</td>
<td>[b, d, g]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bhrata</td>
<td>brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rudhiras</td>
<td>red</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here is an example of how it looks: [http://colfa.utsa.edu/drinka/pie/grimm_tale.htm](http://colfa.utsa.edu/drinka/pie/grimm_tale.htm)
• Reconstructing cultures
  • Reconstructed languages can give clues to archaeologists about the cultures and environments of the past.
  • For instance, Proto-Indo-European had words for many types of trees and for bear, fox and wolf, but not for monkey and elephant.
  • Altogether the words suggest they lived in a temperate environment and that they had domesticated animals.
• Famous attempt at cultural reconstruction is the Nostratic Hypothesis.
  • Two researchers, Illic-Svityc and Dolgopolsky state that several families can be grouped together to make a macrofamily (or phyla): Nostratic (film clip starts about 22:15).
    • Using the comparative method.
      • Concentrating on ‘conservative’ words (archaisms) or what others call the core vocabulary
      • Also uses mass comparison (creating large lists of words from a large number of languages).
  • Argued that they could reconstruct the culture, as well as the proto-language.
  • Criticisms: 1) See patterns that are purely due to chance; and 2) recent work, using grammatical comparisons, negates many of the proposed similarities.
External changes can be quite rapid, as seen in population contacts between groups with very different languages.

- A hybrid of the original languages is created called a **pidgin** (a language that develops out of the contact of two unrelated languages).
- Often consists of the vocabulary (**lexicon**) of one language (the visitors or colonists) and the **grammar** of the other.

**Defining pidgins and creoles**
- Pidgins, then, are developed in contact situations for the purpose of trading/colonization. Pidgins typically evolve out of contact languages, creoles evolve out of pidgin.
- Pidgins are **incomplete** languages with highly simplified grammar and reduced lexicon; creoles expand these.
- Pidgins have a limited range of uses, creoles a wide range. Pidgins rarely last beyond a generation or two.
- Two general types of pidgins:
  1. **Restricted pidgins** are the result of marginal contacts.
  2. **Extended pidgins** are characterized by **nativization** (more words come from the local context).

- The African pidgins that resulted from the European slave trade ended up on the plantations of the New World.
  - As such they were the foundation for full versions of languages.
  - First generation slaves likely used as second language, but children born on the plantations mixed with owners’ languages.
  - These mixes were the **first languages of the children** and are called **creoles**.
Defining pidgins and creoles (continued)

- Creoles are complete languages.
  - Grammar is elaborated.
  - Lexicon is expanded (using ‘dominant’ language.)
  - Subject matter is broadened.
  - Can be first language of community.
- Often seen as bad version of lexifier language (the language that contributes the majority of the words).
  - Haitian Kreol seen as “bad” French.
  - African American English (AAE) seen as “bad” English.
- May persist long-term, become standardized.
  - Swahili, Haitian Kreol, AAE, Tok Pisin.
  - Example to hear: [http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/tokpisin/](http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/tokpisin/)
  - In the Solomon Islands, many urban speakers merge English with Solomon Islands Pidgin (which is a creole or full language).
  - Different than Hawaiian Pidgin (another creole).

Classifying pidgin and creole languages

- Classification is difficult. Two questions must be addressed:
  - Do you place the pidgin/creole with the one that provides the lexicon or the grammar?
  - Is the pidgin/creole a language of the dominant or conquered (indigenous) peoples?
- Answer: Generally align with the grammar language as lexicon is easily borrowed.
• Classifying pidgin and creole languages (continued)
  • Why are there strong grammatical similarities between all the pidgins/creoles in the world? Two camps:
    1. Theoretical (innatist) linguistics camp:
      • Develop from innate bioprogram (innate grammar)
      • Similarities to child language and to the universal grammar
      • Critique: Pidgins/creoles DO have some grammar from donor languages so are not ‘pure’ windows into universal grammar.
    2. Historical linguistics camp:
      • They argue pidgins/creoles can be traced to a pidgin called Sabir – 10th century southern French trade language used in the Mediterranean (lingua franca).
      • Was spread throughout Mediterranean by sailors.
      • Then spread further by European colonization.
• Ideology, politics, and education: How ideas can affect policy
  • The Ebonics controversy
    • Oakland school board decides AAE (African American English, also called Ebonics) is a creole.
      • A different language from English.
      • Oakland school board declared AAE as “Genetically based and not a dialect of English” descended from African languages through pidginization-creolization process.
        • Therefore it is the primary language of the district’s African American students.
        • Board asks for bilingual approach in schools where teachers learn & use AAE to teach standard.
      • A protest erupted as others in the community treated as AAE as inferior variety of English in U.S.
• Bilingualism & diglossia
  • Common pattern when three are two or more languages in a community the speakers of less valued language become bilingual, but those of the dominant stay monolingual.
  • **Bilingualism:** Using two different languages.
  • Who is expected to be bilingual (or multilingual)? Everyone? Immigrants? Minorities?
    • In a 2001 *Gallup poll*, 26% of Americans could hold a conversation in at least 2 languages
    • Common estimate for the world’s population is 66% in 2006 the EU estimated 56% for Europe.
  • Many Americans are advantaged as English is becoming an international language. The disadvantage is most Americans are monolingual.
    • **Here are 8 jobs that need bilingual workers.**
    • While English is an *official language in 52 countries*, Mandarin is the most commonly spoken first language in the world.
  • Commercials promoting bilingualism:
    • *Cat and fish.*
    • *German coast guard*
    • *Klingon1 & Klingon2*
    • *Do you speak English?*
  • Stable (long-term) vs transitional (short-term) bilingualism?
    • **Stable bilingualism** is seen in situations such as one where the second language is an *official language* (i.e., Canada) or where several languages are spoken in the country.
    • Often seen when strong efforts are made to retain these languages.
• **Bilingualism & diglossia (continued)**
  - Stable (long-term) vs transitional (short-term) bilingualism? (continued)
    - **Transitional bilingualism** is evidence by the 3 generation rule: The first generation of immigrants holds their birth language, the second learns the new language and may speak the parental language at home, by the third generation the new language is their birth language.
    - Transitional bilingualism contributes to language death as fewer and fewer native speakers remain.
  - **Diglossia**: using two varieties of one language
    - ‘**High’ and ‘low’ varieties**
    - Formality of situation determines choice
      - German & Swiss German
      - Classical & Colloquial Arabic
      - Marked & ‘Standard’ varieties of English?
  - **Codeswitching** is seen in situations where stable bilingualism occurs.
    - This term is used to define the use of more than one language (or dialect) within a single social situation
    - Often the switch can be within a single sentence.
• **Mock Languages**
  - Pejorative language practice, used by non-speakers of a language that uses elements of the language to create stereotypes.
    - They access hidden stereotypes, are aggressive and mocking.
    - Classic example is **Mock Spanish**.
• Standard languages
  • Carry more social prestige
  • Are thought of as ‘more correct’.
  • Are preferred for formal occasions.
  • The choice is usually ‘arbitrary’.
  • The speech of an ‘upper’ class or a group seen as powerful, respected.
  • Note how the status of speakers can affect the status of a variety.

• Official Languages
  • Language can be a source of division.
    • Basque & Spanish are two different languages.
    • Basque is linked to ethnic pride and is used as an argument for independence.
  • Can language be a source of unity.
    • Czechoslovakia: one language, different cultures.
    • Language not enough to keep country unified as people now think in terms of Czech and Slovak.
    • China: many languages, all called Chinese. But politics more important in keeping country unified.
  • What about the U.S.? English as a de facto standard in the US., not the de jure standard.
    • In the U.S. there has been a long history of English-Only movements. About 3/5 of states have enacted English as official language laws.
    • Question: which variety of English? Geographic Variation: Dialect Map of American English
    • Want to read more? This is one useful link.