

INTD0111A/ARBC0111A

## The Unity and Diversity of Human Language

Lecture #15  
Nov 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2006

## Announcements

None (for a change)

## Transition

- Since "Language = Lexicon + Grammar", then change should be expected to take place in both the lexicon and the grammar of a language.
- On Tuesday we saw examples of how languages can change over time lexically, semantically, and morphologically.
- Today, we look at examples of change in the two remaining components of a language's grammar: syntax and phonology.

## Syntactic change: word order

- Word order in a language could change over time. For example, Old English (OE) had more variable word order than Modern English (ModE) does.
- So, we do find SVO order in simple transitive clauses:  
Hē geseah þone mann  
He saw the man

## Syntactic change: word order

- When the clause began with an element such as þa (= "then"), the verb would follow that element, therefore preceding the subject:  
þa sende sē cyning þone disc  
then sent the king the dish  
"Then the king sent the dish."

## Syntactic change: word order

- When the object was a pronoun, the order in OE was typically SOV:  
Hēo hine lærde  
She him saved  
"She saved him."

### Syntactic change: word order

- The same SOV word order also prevailed in embedded clauses, even when the object was not a pronoun:  
þa hē þone cyning sōhte, hē bēotode  
when he the king visited, he boasted  
“When he visited the king, he boasted.”

### Syntactic change: word order

- As we noted last time, case markings were lost during the Middle English (MidE) period, and, as you should expect, SVO order became the unmarked word order in the language. The following table shows the change in word order that took place around 1300 and 1400:

### Syntactic change: word order

Year	1000	1200	1300	1400	1500
OV %	53	53	40	14	2
VO %	47	47	60	86	98

### Syntactic change: word order

- Modern Arabic dialects are SVO for the most part, even though Classical Arabic was VSO for the most part.
- And while more word orders were possible in Classical Arabic because of the presence of case morphology, many of these orders are not possible in Modern Arabic dialects.

### Syntactic change: negation

- Negation in OE was done by placing the negation marker *ne* before a verbal element:  
þæt he na siþþan geboren ne wurde  
that he never after born not would-be  
“that he should never be born after that”
- Notice word order and the use of double negatives.

### Syntactic change: negation

- Proto-Indo-European is believed to have had a negation marker *ne*.
- In old Latin, a new form arose from combining *ne* with the word for “one” (*ūnum*). This led to the form *non*.
- Hence, Old French ended up with both *non* and *ne*.

## Syntactic change: negation

- Both forms developed a division of labor, where *ne* became the used form when the negation word is placed before verbs, and *non* for other cases of negation:  
Il *ne* dorme pas  
he not sleeps (not)  
Vous venez ou non?  
you come or not
- Interestingly, many French speakers today are dropping the *ne*:  
J'ai pas dit ça  
I've not said this

## Syntactic change: Extension

- Spanish *se* is a reflexive pronoun:  
Yo no vestí a Juanito; se visitó  
I no dressed Johnny ; he himself dressed
- A change has occurred such that the element *se* was extended in use as a marker of the passive construction so that *se visitó* also came to mean "he was dressed", in addition to "he dressed himself".

## Syntactic change: Extension

This *se* passive reading emerges in sentences where both meanings make sense:

*El rico se entierra en la iglesia*

- the rich person has himself buried in the church
- the rich person gets/is buried in the church

## Double comparatives and superlatives

- Examples:  
*more gladder, more lower, moost royallest, moost shamefullest*
- These were all ok in Middle English. Not any more.

## Genitives

The Wife's Tale of Bath	(MidE)
The Wife of Bath's Tale	(ModE)
The man's hat from Boston	(MidE)
The man from Boston's hat	(ModE)

## Phonological change

- Perhaps the most noticeable change in the grammar of a language happens in pronunciation.
- Even though change can affect all areas of phonology (e.g., tone, stress, and syllable structure), we will focus here only on change involving individual sounds as they occur in sequence. We call this *sequential change*.

## Assimilation

- Assimilation takes place when a sound changes to become similar to a neighboring sound:

Old Spanish [semda] → Modern Spanish [senda] "path"  
Early Latin [inpossiblis] → Late Latin [impossiblis]  
Early OE [stefn] → Later OE [stemn] "stem"

## Dissimilation

- Dissimilation is the process whereby one sound is made less like a neighboring sound:

Late Latin [amna] → Spanish [alma] "soul"  
Latin [arbor] → Spanish [arbol] "tree"  
Italian [albero]  
(but cf. French *arbre*).

## Epenthesis

- Epenthesis is the insertion of a vowel or a consonant:

Earlier OE [ganra] → Late OE [gandra] "gander"  
Latin [schola] → Spanish [escuela] "school"

## Metathesis

- Metathesis involves a change in the positioning of two sounds:  
Earlier OE [waps] → Late OE [wasp] "wasp"

## Vowel deletion

- A vowel may be deleted from a word, resulting in *apocope* (if the vowel is final) or *syncope* (if the vowel is medial):
- Apocope:  
Latin [ōrmāre] → French [orner] "decorate"
- Syncope:  
Latin [pérdere] → French [perdre] "lose"

## Consonant deletion

- Consonants may also delete from a word giving rise to another instance of phonological change: Old and Middle English had [kn] and [gn], but the initial consonant underwent deletion.
- And of course French provides a great example of loss of word-final consonant deletion:  
gros [gro] "large"  
chaud [šo] "warm"

## Substitution

- Substitution involves the replacement of one sound with another similar sound:
  - MidE [x] → ModE [f] in "laugh"
  - Standard English [θ] → Cockney [f] in "thin"

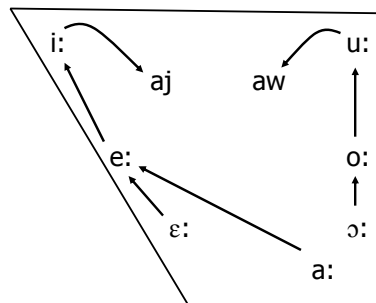
## Phonological Shift

- A phonological shift is a change in which a series of sounds is systematically modified so that their organization with respect to each other is altered.
- A well known example of this phonological change is the so-called *Great Vowel Shift (GVS)* in the history of English, where the seven long vowels underwent the series of modifications between 1400-1600, as shown in the following table:

## The Great Vowel Shift

Shift		Example		
MidE	ModE	MidE	ModE	
[i:]	→ [aj]	[mi:s]	→ [maj]	"mice"
[u:]	→ [aw]	[mu:s]	→ [maw]	"mouse"
[e:]	→ [i:]	[ge:s]	→ [gi:s]	"geese"
[o:]	→ [u:]	[go:s]	→ [gu:s]	"goose"
[ɛ:]	→ [e:]	[bre:k]	→ [bre:k]	"break"
[ɔ:]	→ [o:]	[brɔ:k]	→ [bro:k]	"broke"
[a:]	→ [e:]	[na:mə]	→ [ne:m]	"name"

## The Great Vowel Shift



## The Great Vowel Shift

- We can see effects of the GVS in the alternation between long and short vowels in word pairs like those below:
  - please-pleasant*
  - serene-serenity*
  - sane-sanity*
  - crime-criminal*

## The Great Vowel Shift

- The alternation is the result of the GVS taking place after the Early Middle English Vowel Shortening rule affected the second word in each pair. When the GVS occurred, it affected only the first word of each pair since it was the one that had the long vowel by then.

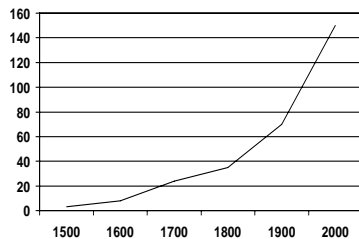
## Spread of change through the language

- A linguistic change may manifest itself at first in a few words, and then gradually spreads through the vocabulary of the language. We call this *lexical diffusion*.

## Lexical Diffusion

- A good example of lexical diffusion from English has to do with an ongoing change in the stress pattern of words such as *convert*, which can be either a noun or a verb.
- Originally, the stress fell on the second syllable of such words, regardless of their lexical category.
- In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, three words, *rebel*, *outlaw*, and *record*, came to be pronounced with the stress on the first syllable when used as nouns. And this stress shift has “diffused” ever since.

## Diffusion of stress shift in English



## Non-gradual Diffusion: Cuban Spanish

- But not all phonological changes involve gradual diffusion. Some changes affect all instances of the sounds involved rather immediately.
- For example, the weakening in Cuban Spanish of [s] to [h] in syllable final-position applies to all instances where [s] occurs in that position:

Spanish Spanish	Cuban Spanish	
[filismente]	[filihmente]	“happily”
[estilo]	[ehtilo]	“type”

## Spread of change through the population

- For a language change to take place, the innovation must be accepted by the linguistic community.
- So, even though children acquiring English produce *goed*, the form was never accepted.
- Similarly, *throve* is not accepted as the past tense form of *thrive* (cf. drive-drove).

## Spread of change through the population

- Social pressures often play an important role in the spread of a particular innovation.
- For example, when a change takes place in the speech of a high prestige group, it may gradually start spreading to other groups, and ultimately to the whole linguistic community.

## Spread of change through the population

- The loss of postvocalic [r] along the east coast of the US is a famous example.
- Pronunciations such as [fa:] for [fa:r] originated in parts of England in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- It spread along the east coast of the US by the children of the New England gentry who brought these pronunciations back with them from British schools, as well as the newly arrived immigrants who enjoyed high social status as colonial administrators and church officials.
- As a result, the innovation was widely imitated and spread along much of the east coast and the south.

## Spread of change through the population

- But social pressures also limited the spread of that innovation.
- In Pennsylvania and other Midland states the most prestigious group of settlers were Quakers from northern England, an area that retained postvocalic [r].
- Similarly, in Canada, the influence of Scottish and Irish settlers, whose dialect retained the [r], limited the spread of the innovation to those areas there were in contact with New England, e.g., Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.
- Interestingly, now it's looking like "r-less" pronunciations have become stigmatized and we see an opposite trend for [r] restoration.

## Summary of language change and transition to "reconstruction"

- To sum up, a language undergoes change in its lexicon as well as all components of grammar (morphology, syntax, phonology, and semantics).
- Over time, these changes might become considerable enough to the point where we become unable to tell if two historical varieties of the same language are actually related. Luckily, though, historical linguists developed ways to establish historical relations among languages. We discuss this next week.

## Next class agenda

- Reconstruction of "dead" languages. The comparative method. Cognates.
- Why do languages change?