



CHANGES IN LANGUAGE USE

Dr. Narender Dahiya, Asstt. Prof. in English (P.G), A.I.J.H.M College, Rohtak

Abstract : Language change is the phenomenon by which permanent alteration are made in the features and the use of a language over time. All natural languages change, and language change affects all areas of language use. Types of language change include sound changes, lexical changes, semantic changes, and syntactic changes.

The branch of linguistics that is expressly concerned with changes in a language (or in language) over time is historical linguistics (also known as diachronic linguistics.

Language change is variation over time in a language’s phonological, morphological, semantic, syntactic, and other features. It is studied by historical linguistics and evolutionary linguistics. Some commentators use the label corruption to suggest that language change constitutes a degradation in the quality of a language, especially when the change originates from human error or prescriptively discouraged usage. Descriptive linguistics typically does not support the concept, since from a scientific point of view such changes are neither good nor bad.

Language is always changing. We’ve seen that language changes across space and across social group. Language also varies across time.

Generation by generation, pronunciations evolve, new words are borrowed or invented, the meaning of old words drifts and morphology develops or decays. The rate of change varies, but whether the changes are faster or slower, they build up until the “mother tongue” becomes arbitrarily distance and different. After a thousand years, the original and new languages will not be mutually intelligible. After ten thousand years, the relationship will be essentially indistinguishable from chance relationship between historically unrelated languages.

In isolated subpopulations speaking the language, most changes will not be shared. As a result, such subgroups will drift apart linguistically, and eventually will not be able to understand one another.

In the modern world, language change is often socially problematic. Long before divergent dialects lose mutual intelligibility completely, they begin to show difficulties and inefficiencies in communication, especially under noisy or stressful conditions. Also, as people observe language change, they usually react negatively, feeling that the language has “gone down hill”. You never seem to hear older people commenting that the language of their children or grandchildren’s generation has improved compared to the language of their own youth.

Here is a puzzle: language change is functionally disadvantageous, in that it hinder communication, and it is also negatively evaluated by socially dominant groups. Nevertheless is a universal fact of human history.

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