1. Scope of this term’s lectures

We will be discussing historical changes that involve the following aspects of linguistic competence:

- Morphology
- Syntax
- Lexicon (specifically, lexical semantics)

Next term: Historical changes that involve the phonology of a language.

2. Basic concepts

- Uniformitarian hypothesis: The idea that ‘the languages of the past...are not different in nature from those of the present’ (Croft 2003; cited in Roberts 2007:6).

  Also, Uniformitarian Principle: ‘...the claim that the same mechanisms which operated to produce the large-scale changes of the past may be observed in the current changes taking place around us.’ (Labov 1972:161; cited in McMahon 1994:233).

- Actualisation
- Actuation
- Transmission
- S-curve

2.1 Some historical data: English stress alternations

Rule dictates shift of stress in certain verbs that are related to nouns (or adjectives).

Examples:

'I dispute that' vs. 'Mary took no part in the dispute.'

'Brazil may default on its loans this year' vs. 'The default file on my computer just got deleted.'

'The police had to direct the traffic because of the accident' vs. 'She’s one of the most direct people you’ll ever meet.'
More examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERB</th>
<th>NOUN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pervért</td>
<td>pérvert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recórd</td>
<td>récord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transpórt</td>
<td>tránsport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>convért</td>
<td>cónvert</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But there are also exceptions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERB</th>
<th>NOUN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>recórd</td>
<td>récord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transpórt</td>
<td>tránsport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>convért</td>
<td>cónvert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>préface</td>
<td>préface</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is (logically) possible to distinguish three stages / processes in this particular change:

1. The rule appears in the language: Form a verb by moving the stress of the corresponding noun from the first to the second syllable = actuation.

2. The rule applies to more and more words in the language (or more and more linguistic contexts) = actualisation / extension

3. The change spreads to more and more speakers (different social groups) and through more and more registers (stylistic levels) = transmission (diffusion)

Many changes can be thought of in this way (or partly in this way).

Source: Sherman (1975) 'Noun-verb stress alternation: An example of the lexical diffusion of sound change in English.'

S-curve: Typically, an innovation starts slowly, affecting just a few words. The change then gains momentum and quite rapidly extends to other eligible words. At some point, the momentum slackens and there may be a 'residue' left
unaffected by the change. These words may or may not change eventually. (Aitchison 2001:91).

But is the same pattern observed when the change affects not words but instead whole syntactic constructions? We’ll return to this issue later this term.

Notably, different linguists have different views on where ‘true’ change lies:

“The problem is that ‘one swallow doth not a summer make,’ and one change in the grammar of an individual does not constitute what we think of as a change in ‘a language.’” (Hopper & Traugott 1993:36)

"Methodologically it is certainly preferable to recognize change only when it has spread from the individual to a group...” (Hopper & Traugott 1993:38)

“...a general theory of change must provide an account for any change, regardless of whether or not it diffuses.” (Hale 1998:6)

3. Explanations of language change

3.1 Typological explanations

Changes are movements towards unmarked types of language, for example, languages with symmetrical consonant systems, languages where modifiers all go on the same side of the head.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old English</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Θ</th>
<th>s</th>
<th>ŋ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modern English</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Θ</th>
<th>s</th>
<th>ŋ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>v</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>𝛿</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 External explanations

✓ loans
✓ borrowing of sounds and constructions
✓ convergence
3.3 Internal explanations

3.3.1 Generative (acquisition-based) model

Generative syntactic theory holds that there are certain fundamental principles of syntax that are universal, i.e. part of Universal Grammar. The grammar acquired by the individual will be specific to the particular language the person is acquiring but will nevertheless respect universal principles.

Examples of universal syntactic principles: (1) Lexical items belong to syntactic categories; (2) combinatory operations apply to syntactic constituents; (3) constituency relations are hierarchical.

Generative view of language change: There is a discontinuity of transmission between each generation and the next. Each generation has to create the rules of the language afresh. Change takes place when children abduce grammatical information that does not match that held by speakers in the previous generation. (Andersen 1973)

Essentially, children's mistakes today are tomorrow's linguistic changes.

DEDUCTION

| Law            | All men are mortal. |
| Case           | Socrates is a man.  |
| Result         | Socrates is mortal. |

INDUCTION

| Cases          | Socrates is a man. |
| Source         | Aristotle is a man.|
| Source          | Plato is a man.   |
| Results        | Socrates is mortal.|
| Source         | Aristotle is mortal.|
| Results        | Plato is mortal.   |
| Law            | All men are mortal.|

D. Anderson
ABDUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Socrates is dead.</th>
<th>but</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Socrates is dead.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>All men are mortal.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Law</td>
<td>All fruit flies are mortal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case</td>
<td>Socrates is a man.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Case</td>
<td>Socrates is a fruit fly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children take what they hear around them (‘results’), apply innate knowledge (‘laws’) and construe a grammar (the ‘case’). Then they test the grammar by induction (checking it against more data) and deduction (speaking and succeeding or not). Sometimes, however, they abduce a grammatical rule (‘case’) that is not present in the adult grammar (i.e. Grammar 1). (See McMahon 1994:92-5 for further discussion.)

3.4 Pragmatic explanations

Functionalist view:
- languages change as the result of use (by adults not children)
- inferences become fixed and grammaticalised

3.4.1 Some data: English ‘go’

English Stage 1: *I am going to fetch water from the river*
implies ‘in the future I will get water from the river.’
*I am going to get better* is not possible.

English Stage 2: *going to* has inherent (not inferred) future meaning, so
*I am going to fetch water from the river*
means ‘in the future I will get water from the river’
and *I am going to get better* means ‘in the future I will get better.’

(Aitchison 2001:110)

Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*: ‘going to’ appears 24 times and accounts for 4% of expressions of future time.

Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye*: ‘going to’ appears 75 times and accounts for 30% of expressions of future time.

4. Reanalysis

Reanalysis = “a mechanism which changes the underlying structure of a syntactic pattern and which does not involve any immediate or intrinsic modification of its surface manifestation” (Harris & Campbell 1995:61;
definition goes back to Langacker 1977).

Harris and Campbell propose that *reanalysis* is one of only three *mechanisms* of syntactic change, the other two being *extension* and *borrowing*.

Aspects of the grammar affected by reanalysis (Harris and Campbell 1995:61):

(a) constituency
(b) hierarchical structure
(c) category labels
(d) grammatical relations
(e) cohesion

4.1 A reanalysis affecting syntactic category: *Modal verbs*

(Lightfoot 1979; reviewed in McMahon 1994:116-19)

In the 16th century, a new category of verbs, Modal, was created through reanalysis of certain OE verbs (the ‘premodals’).

*Old English*: I may will go; I am musting see her.

*Modern English*: I may go; I will go; I must see her.

4.2 A reanalysis affecting grammatical relations: *English ‘like’*

*Middle English*: Him liked pears (OVS); The king like pears (OVS)

*Modern English*: He liked pears (SVO); The king likes pears (SVO)

4.3 More data: *English ‘for’*

*Middle English*: (It is better for me) (to slay myself than to be violated thus)

*Modern English*: (It is better)((for me to slay myself) than to be violated thus)

The division of the Modern English constituents can be demonstrated through movement (*e.g.* fronting) of the ‘for’ clause:

[For me to slay myself] would be better than to be violated thus.

- ‘for’ changes syntactic category (preposition becomes a complementiser)
- the clause boundary and constituency relations shift
4.4 Timberlake’s (1977) study of reanalysis and actualisation: Finnish participial clauses

- There are two main aspects to syntactic change: reanalysis (‘the formulation of a novel set of underlying relationships and rules’) and actualisation (‘the gradual mapping out of the consequences of the reanalysis’)

- Changes will be actualized sooner in unmarked (i.e. more natural) contexts than in marked ones.

4.5 Features of and issues in reanalysis

4.5.1 Reanalysis needs ambiguity

Reanalysis needs ambiguity in the surface output, but how much is not clear. It is possible that ambiguity in the least marked (and statistically most frequent) environment is particularly conducive to reanalysis.

“...still it is surprising that the ambiguity inherent in only one variant of the construction could be taken as representative of the whole construction.” (Timberlake 1977: 149).

“...a subset of the tokens of a particular constructional type must be open to the possibility of multiple structural analyses, where one potential analysis is the old one (applicable to all tokens) and the other potential analysis is the new one (applicable to a subset).” (Harris & Campbell 1995:72)

4.5.2 Reanalysis may be fed

Reanalysis may be facilitated by change in other parts of the grammar:
In Timberlake’s Finnish study, phonological change leads to the merger (syncretism) of accusative and genitive case for some nouns, providing the ambiguity needed for reanalysis.

Compare also the appearance of French question marker ‘ti’, which may have been facilitated by the phonological loss of the /l/ in ‘-t-il’, as in:

Dort-il? (Does he sleep?)
Aime-t-il? (Does he love?)

Modern French:
Tu vas ti? (you go-2sing-Q)
4.5.3 Reanalysis and directionality: The ‘chicken and egg’ problem
Change is the chicken; reanalysis is the egg.

Two views:

1. Reanalysis occurs late, only after a series of unrelated changes which complicate the grammar. If so, why should the complications arise in the first place? How did the change maintain its directionality, or, in the terms of Andersen (1990), what is the structure of drift? More in lecture 3.

2. Actualisation follows reanalysis: Directionality is maintained through exception/adaptive rules (see Andersen 1973, Disterheft 1990).

5. More general issue: Discreteness versus gradualness

Syntactic change is gradual in that:

(a) the grammar gradually adjusts to the new system through a series of actualisations in different syntactic environments (cf. Timberlake’s 1977 example);

(b) some syntactic phenomena spread from lexical item to lexical item (Naro & Lemle 1976; Warner 1982: 117–23);

(c) extensions may remove one exception at a time (cf. Harris & Campbell’s constraint that extension of a rule is limited to removing conditions on its operation);

(d) the frequency of a new phenomenon may increase gradually over time (Kroch 1989).

Syntactic change is discrete in that:

(a) the grammar is constructed anew by each generation of speakers;

(b) the process of reanalysis is itself discrete: any individual speaker has either the new analysis or the old one.

(NB: Full versions of certain of the citations referenced above can be found by consulting the supervision assignments at http://www.ling.cam.ac.uk/Li7)
Reading Recommendations

The historical linguistics textbooks vary enormously in quality on syntactic change. McMahon and (especially) Campbell are the best, but you will need to look beyond them.

Reference


Introductory


More advanced


The English stress alternation example is from:

The development of English consonants is from: