

**PAPER 7 (HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS)**  
**TYPES OF LANGUAGE CHANGE**

Language change may be broadly divided into two categories:

1. external change, and
2. internal change.

External change is mainly caused by the adoption of borrowing whereas internal change is caused by the addition and loss of sounds and lexical items, coinages of new words and extensions. Level wise study of the language change may be made in terms of:

- A. Sound change
- B. Grammatical and lexical change, and
- C. Semantic change.

**SOUND CHANGE:** Traditionally historical linguistic studies begin with sound change which is a term to describe the passage of historical transition from a given phoneme or group of phonemes to another, e.g. the change of Germanic [sk] into Old English [sh].

There are various theories that justify the causes of sound change. The first is that sound change is brought about by anatomical changes within the population. Others assign sound change to social and historical reasons and discover a link between political instability and linguistic instability. Other theories that discuss the causes of sound change are substratum theory, ease theory and imitation theory.

Linguists have divided sound change into three categories:

1. Unconditioned (or Generic) changes
2. Conditioned (or Combinatory) changes, and
3. Sporadic (or Miscellaneous) changes.

**UNCONDITIONED (OR GENERIC) CHANGES**

A generic or unconditioned change is a change that affects every occurrence of a certain sound, no matter whereabouts in the words it occurs. For example, Old English /a:/ changes everywhere to Middle English /o:/ and to Modern English /ou/.

OE /a:/ > ME /o:/ > Mod E /ou/

The word ham /ha:m/, for example, became hoom /ho:m/ in ME, and home /houm/ in Modern English. But unconditioned or generic changes are rare.

**CONDITIONED (OR COMBINATORY) CHANGES**

Conditioned or combinatory changes are changes which occur only under a fixed set of conditions. "Allophones of phoneme", says Lehmann, "are generally restricted to certain environments: here they are conditioned by their surrounding. When such allophones undergo a change, we speak of a conditioned or a combinatory change." For example, ME /u/ to NE /u/ after labials. PGmc /f, O, s/ to /v, d, g/ when not preceded by the chief stress.

**SPORADIC CHANGE**

It is not easy to draw the line between conditioned change and sporadic change since the two merge into one another. So we treat the word "sporadic" very loosely to mean a change of phoneme that does not occur elsewhere and also to include morphophonemic changes. The most important types of sporadic changes are:

1. Assimilation
2. Disssimilation
3. Metathesis

4. Epenthesis
5. Hypology
6. Vowel mutation, and
7. Elision

### **GRAMMATICAL CHANGE**

Grammatical change is the change in grammar and vocabulary. By grammatical change, the members of a grammatical set are increased or reduced in number, and the means involved in marking grammatical categories are extended. Since such changes are carried out in accordance with patterns which already exist in the language, they are referred to as analogical and the process itself is called analogy.

Analogy is a process by which morphs, combination of morphs or linguistic patterns are modified, or new ones created in accordance with those present in a language.

#### **TYPES OF ANALOGY**

##### **1 Pure Grammatical**

e.g. English *evyn* > *eyes* after plural - s. English *can* > *could* in the past tense on the basis of *will* - *would*, *shall* - *should*.

##### **2. Semantic**

e.g. *male*, *femel* > *male*, *female*

English borrowed the French word '*male*' and '*femelle*' - but owing to their semantic link '*femelle*' became '*female*' under the influence of *male*.

##### **3. Back formation**

e.g. '*beg*' from '*beggar*' after pairs such as *sing*, *singer*.

Besides these, other types of analogy are '*phonetic analogy*', '*hypercorrection*', '*extension of alternant form*' and '*syntactical analogy*'.

### **LEXICAL CHANGE**

Indeed, there is no distinct dividing line between grammatical change and lexical change. Many a time the two intersect. The vocabulary of a language is more strictly called the '*lexis*' of a language, and it is lexical items which are examined. For convenience, lexical change can be divided into three categories:

1. Loss of lexical items
2. Change of meaning, and
3. Creation of new lexical items.

**LOSS OF LEXICAL ITEMS:** Due to internal and external factors, words undergo a change. '*Homonymic clash*', '*phonetic alteration*' and the need to shorten common words are common internal causes. Homonyms are words which have the same phonemic structure but different meanings as '*bank*'. The existence of homonyms need not lead to word loss. It only does so if the homonyms crop up in the same context and cause confusion as in the homonymic class between English '*leten*' (to permit) and *latten* (to hinder). It is out of those homonyms that the English word '*led*' was developed.

Phonetic attrition is not common. Sometimes a word becomes so altered by sound change that it almost disappears. A well known example is the Latin word '*apem*' which was replaced by longer words such as '*abeille*'.

The need to shorten common words is a type of attrition, a linguistic phenomenon known as Zipf's law. Zipf showed that common words tend to be shorter than uncommon

ones. For example, 'refrigerator' became 'fridge', and 'television' became 'tele' or 'TV'; 'aeroplane' became 'plane'.

**CHANGE OF MEANING:** It is studied in semantic change. There are so many causes 'linguistic', 'historical', 'environmental', 'psychological', etc., that bring change in meaning. For example the word 'persona', which in the beginning of Roman drama meant 'mask', then 'a character indicated by a mask', thereupon a character or a 'role in a play'.

**CREATION OF NEW LEXICAL ITEMS:** It is caused by external borrowing and internal borrowing. English has borrowed from French the words like 'crown', 'power', 'state', etc., from Arabic the words like 'zero', 'zenith', 'alchemy', etc. These are the examples of external borrowings. Internal borrowings frequently start out as slang, which later becomes accepted as 'snob', 'squabble', 'hard up'. 'Bird', now becoming acceptable in meaning of 'girl', is perhaps borrowed from the word 'bride'.

### **SEMANTIC CHANGE**

Diachronic semantics studies semantic change, whereas synchronic semantics accounts for semantic relationship, simple or multiple. According to referential theory given by Ullman in his book, "Principles", "a semantic change will occur whenever a new name becomes attached to a sense, or a new sense to a new name." Semantic change is caused by 'linguistic, historical, environmental, psychological causes'. It is caused by 'foreign influences and the need for a new name'.

**TYPES OF SEMANTIC CHANGE:** There is a considerable disagreement among scholars on the classification and terminology of semantic change. According to Meillet, there are three types of semantic change:

1. Changes due to linguistic reasons

e.g. 'contagion': the negative use of 'pas, personne, point, reing, Jomais', owing to purely syntagmatic conditions.

2. Changes due to historical reasons

e.g. the 'thing-meant' becomes modified in the course of culture development, whereas the name remains unaltered: 'plume'/. feather. pen:

3. Changes due to social stratification: Latin 'ponere', trahere', 'cubrare', 'mutare', employed in a specialized social group, the word of farming, acquire a more restricted sense in 'pondre', 'traire', 'couver', 'muer', 'ad-ripare', borrowed by the common standard from nautical terminology, receives the widened sense of French 'arriver'. Professor Sperber classifies these changes in the following manner:

A. Non-affective changes: pseudo changes (ellipsis), name giving, modification in the referent, and

B. Affective changes: (i) speaker's own feelings: (1) expansion (2) attraction, and (ii) his regard for the hearer's emotions.