

## Lecture 7: Syntactic (Grammatical) Change

### 1. Re-Cap of Main Concepts:

- a. Language & the Cycle of Linguistic Change
- b. Causes of Linguistic Change: Our Anatomy & Our Minds

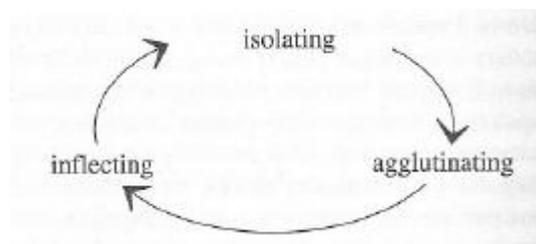
### 2. Analogy & Extension/Generalization: ‘Grammar Gets a Virus’

### 3. Grammaticalization & Reanalysis: Two More Facets of Grammatical Change

## Re-Cap of Main Concepts: Language & the Cycle of Linguistic Change

In the past weeks, we have talked a lot about language and linguistic change. The most important points we should remember are:

- Language is a living system of arbitrary symbols (Linguistic Signs), with  $\lambda$ -specific rules of combining all linguistic units (phonemes into morphemes, morphemes into words & phrases, and words & phrases into sentences) to create meaning.
- This fluid adaptive system is constantly constructed and reconstructed by language users: the synchronic view, which focuses on the competence of idealised speakers at a given point in time, is inaccurate, because it is impossible to completely define something that is constantly and continuously changing.
- Languages may change typologically according to a type of cycle: isolating languages tend to develop some agglutinating structures, agglutinating languages tend to move towards the inflectional type, and inflecting languages tend to become less inflectional over time, and more isolating (Please refer to Crowley’s Chapter 7.1 for a look at grammatical change and at the processes that drive this cycle of change):



## Causes of Linguistic Change: Natural Tendencies & ‘Therapeutic’ Changes

- Sound erosion, along with resultant morphological and lexical changes slowly morph all words into new ones, barely recognizable as their descendants. In all languages, there is a strong tendency for sounds to erode and disappear over time, particularly in unstressed positions. But if sound change were just weakening and erosion, then all languages would have eventually worn down to nothing over the ages! Luckily, sounds also transform into new ones (See Crowley’s Chapter 2).
- Language contact may also cause significant changes in vocabulary and even grammar.
- Because language is a fluid system of interlocking combinatorial patterns on several levels (of phonemes, morphemes, words, and groups of words), changes in one level usually send ‘ripples’ through the whole system.

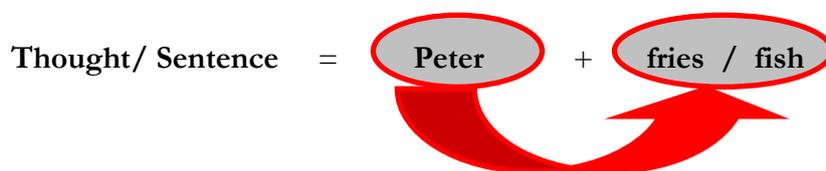
- ‘*Therapeutic*’ changes are driven by *analogy* (fundamental feature of human reason: the ability to draw parallels between similar events); they tend to restore broken linguistic patterns.

### Analogy: McWhorter’s ‘Extension’/Generalization: “Grammar Gets a Virus”

Up until now we have been looking at how the gradual change/ erosion of a language’s sounds transforms the *forms* of the Linguistic Signs (their morphological structure), and how this, in turn, affects  $\lambda$  *syntax* (= the way words are combined together to form a *grammatical* – i.e., *correct* – sentence).

*Why* should the changing *sound forms* of Linguistic Signs affect the way we put them together??? In other words, why should the *forms* of the Linguistic Signs affect the *structure* = *shape* of the whole *Sentence*\*???

\*Sentence/ thought = connection between what we talk about & what we say about it



The second process that changes languages into new ones worldwide is a tendency for some patterns in a grammar to extend (by *analogy*) into general across-the-board rules.

For example, if we wanted to make Latin words for *woman* and *sister* plural, then we needed different rules. Latin for ‘sisters’ – *sorores* – ends in –es, but *feminae* (pl. of *femina* - ‘women’) ends in –ae. These words belonged to different classes of noun (called *declensions*), whose sets of endings differed. Nouns of masculine grammatical gender had the nominative plural ending –i: *dominus* ‘lord’ was *domini* in the plural.

As Latin endings wore away while Latin was morphing into French, only one of the three plural endings was left behind: speakers began to use the plural ending –s with all nouns, instead of only those of a certain class. The plural of French *femme* is *femmes*, and the plural of the French descendants of *dominus* – *dom* and *don* – both pluralize with the –s marker as *doms* and *dons*.

This happened in English, too – it used to be highly inflected, almost like Latin:

The plural of <i>fox</i>	was	<i>foxas</i> , while the plural of
<i>tunge</i>	–	<i>tungan</i> (‘tongue, tongues’),
<i>waeter</i>	-	<i>waeter</i> (‘water, waters’), and the plural of
<i>boc</i> (‘book’)	-	<i>bec</i> (‘books’ – here we see a change in the root vowel [umlaut]).

As the endings became ‘frayed’ over time and began to ‘drop off,’ the –s plural marker took over: now we have not only *foxes*, but also *tongues*, *waters*, and *books*! If this had not happened, the plural of *book* would be *beek*! ☺ However, only a few remnants of old forms still survive in the language as so-called ‘irregular’ nouns: *mouse* – *mice*, *man* – *men*, *woman* – *women*, *brother* – *brethren*/(*brothers*), *deer* – *deer*, *sheep* – *sheep*, *goose* – *geese*, etc.

This is a *qualitatively* different process from sound change – this is an example of how some existing patterns in a language are extended into general rules.

Since  $\lambda$  has 2 aspects: psychological + physical = sound + idea (psycho-physical basis of speech), both our anatomy ('organs of speech') and our minds (the way we reason) will condition language change.

We already know that

Thinking = making connections/ associations/ perceiving relationships between things/ concepts.

The 3 principles of human understanding (thinking) /3 basic types of associations we make, are:

- ⇒ Resemblance (Metaphor)
- ⇒ Contiguity (Metonymy – association based on closeness in space/time – not on resemblance)
- ⇒ Cause/Effect

This process of *extension*, or *generalisation*, of some patterns in a language is driven by the logic of our reasoning - *analogy* (our ability to draw parallels between similar events), represented by the 3 principles of human understanding.

Another example of generalisation: the general spread of the past tense ending *-ed* in Modern English. Thousands of years ago, Proto-Indo-European, the language ancestral to English and most other European languages, had rules that replaced root vowels with others to form the past tense of most verbs (remember, *umlaut*?). Old English verbs also fell into several classes: strong verbs had seven (!) conjugations:

I. drifan:	draf – drifon – (ge)drifen	'drive'
II. ceosan:	ceas – curon - coren	'choose'
III. helpan:	healp – hulpon – holpen	'help'
IV. beran:	bær - bæron - boren	'bear'
V. sprecan:	spræc - spræcon - sprecen	'speak'
VI. faran:	for – foron – faren	'fare, go'
VII. feallan:	feoll – feollon – feallen	'fall'

And weak verbs in Old English had three classes/conjugations:

I. Infinitive ending in -an, past sg. -(e)de:

fremman	fremede,	(ge)fremed	'to perform'
hieran	hierde,	hied	'to hear'

II. Infinitive ending in -ian, past sg. -ode:

lufian	lufode,	(ge)lofod	'to love'
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III. *habban* 'have,' *libban* 'live,' *secgan* 'say,' *hycgan* 'think':

libban	lifde	(ge)lifd
habban	hæfde	hæfd
secgan	sægde –	sægd
hycgan	hogde/hogode	hogod

Over centuries, the past marker of the weak verbs (class I) *-ede* spread by analogy to most other verbs, and with the final vowel weakened to nothing, became our modern English past ending *-ed*. The ‘irregular’ or ‘strong’ verbs in modern English are mere fossils of the rules that applied in OE – the rules themselves are dead and gone. Even now, despite the ‘slow-down’ in linguistic change, which is due to standardization imposed by written language, we can see it happening in a few verbs that have ‘double’ past forms: *to burn – burnt/burned*, *to dive – dove/dived*, *to learn – learnt/learned*, *to quit – quit/quitted*, *to dream – dreamt/dreamed*, *to spill – spilled/spilt*, *to spoil – spoiled/spoilt*, etc.

This selective nature of linguistic change, which spreads through most of the language, but often leaves ‘exceptions’ to new rules for no apparent reason (remember the S-shaped graph of the spread of linguistic change through language?) is made fun of in this rhyme:

**Sally Salter, she was a young teacher who taught,  
And her friend, Charlie Church, was a preacher who praught;  
Though his enemies called him a screecher, who scraught.**

**His heart, when he saw her, kept sinking, and sunk;  
And his eye, meeting hers, began winking, and wunk;  
While she in her turn, fell to thinking, and thunk.**

**In secret he wanted to speak, and he spoke,  
To seek with his lips what his heart long had soke,  
So he managed to let the truth leak, and it loke.**

**The kiss he was dying to steal, then he stole;  
At the feet where he wanted to kneel, then he knole;  
And he said, ‘I feel better than ever I fole’ 😊**

## Grammaticalization & Reanalysis: Two More Facets of Grammatical Change

*Grammaticalization* and *reanalysis* are two important processes of grammatical change caused by shifts in the meanings of words and possible differences in speech perception. These two processes are crucially related, yet they are not mutually dependent and can often occur alone.

### **N.B. A little reminder:**

Words in languages can be grouped into two basic categories: *lexical (content) words* and *grammatical (function) words*:

- **Lexical, or ‘content’ words** have definable concrete meanings even when they are used out of any linguistic context, i.e. ‘book,’ ‘interesting,’ ‘student,’ etc.
- **Grammatical, or ‘function’ words**, on the other hand, acquire their meaning when they occur in context, with other words; they relate these other words together to form grammatical sentences (that’s their function, and that is why they are called ‘function’ words). **Their meanings are grammatical**, and not concrete: for example, they can express futurity, perfect tenses, passive voice, negation, etc. Definite/indefinite articles, conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, auxiliary and modal verbs, possessive and demonstrative adjectives, etc., are all *function* words: they provide the framework for content words, much like cement that holds bricks together in a wall.

The term *grammaticalization* has two or even three definitions: it refers to the study of

- how grammatical forms arise,
- how they are used, and
- how they influence language.

We shall use it to refer to the actual linguistic process whereby lexical items become more grammatical over time. Some words, particularly nouns and verbs, can lose this lexical status and become grammaticalized; in other words, they gradually lose their original meaning through *semantic bleaching* and acquire a purely grammatical meaning. For example, the English verb **go** has shifted from a sense of motion to a sense of futurity. Compare:

I am going to Lae (motion)

And

I am going to do it anyway (futurity)

In the second example, *go* lost its original meaning of ‘walking’ through semantic bleaching, and is used purely for the grammatical purpose of expressing futurity.

Lexical items therefore become more minor grammatical categories, such as prepositions (i.e., **ahead, in front of, inside, across, back of**, etc.). Later these may become affixes, linked to and dependent on other words, and even be lost altogether, or undergo further grammatical processes (remember the processes of phonological reduction, morphological fusion, and morphological reduction, the driving forces in the cycle of linguistic change?)

**Grammaticalization is not a purely syntactic process: it also involves changes in semantics, morphology, and phonology, as *go* demonstrates.** McMahan, a well-known Scottish linguist, says, ‘...a change on one level may motivate further developments elsewhere’ (1994: 161). Also, any type of grammatical change may affect other areas of language.

#### Example

- **Grammaticalized forms are particularly prone to phonological reduction**: you can say, ‘I’m gonna be there!’ – but can you say, ‘I’m gonna Lae’? ☺
- **Why is this so?** In connected speech, we tend to place stress on content words, leaving function words unstressed, as in: ‘I have not seen him’ - [aiv – nɒt – si:n – im], ‘a cuppa tea’ - [ə kʌpəti:], ‘I’m outta here’ - [aim aʊtə hiə], etc.

**Phases of Grammaticalization:** Grammaticalization is a gradual, rather than abrupt, transition – although the actual cognitive leap/qualitative change from lexical to grammatical status may be instantaneous, its consequences are not. The change from lexical to grammatical meaning is only the first step in the process of grammaticalization, the next step being *morphologisation*, i.e., the development of a bound form out of what was originally a free form. In fact, morphologisation can also involve *degrees* of bonding between bound forms, as we can distinguish between *clitics\** and *affixes*.

\*A clitic is a bound form which is processed as being attached to a whole phrase, rather than to a single word. They do not alter the item’s meaning significantly, like derivational morphemes do – they are forms which are restricted to appearing next to another word – the *host* – which they are dependent on. English ‘contractions’ are a good example: ‘s is a *proclitic* in expressions like *it’s me*; it appears before the host and nowhere else. Clitics are not an example of reanalysis: word boundaries rather than morpheme boundaries are altered, changing only the surface representation – this happens because of phonological reduction

Affixes, as we know, get attached directly (or consecutively) to the root as prefixes or suffixes.

Grammaticalisation tends to move along a continuum of increasingly grammaticalised status:

Content item → grammatical word → clitic → inflectional affix

Grammaticalization can occur in many different ways, at many different points in time. Different forms may compete, be lost or gain important new grammatical properties.

**Reanalysis** is another facet of grammatical change resulting from quite common ambiguity of surface syntactic structures and consequent differences in our perception and analysis of these structures. Reanalysis does not involve any immediate modification of the ambiguous surface structures, even though it may eventually lead to changes on the surface level – *actualisation* – in which the consequences of the reanalysis gradually affect the surface structure as well.

Reanalysis can occur at several levels:

- The *phonemic* surface output, with information on morpheme boundary placement, and
- The more abstract *syntactic/semantic* level, with the syntactic and semantic properties of the morphemes encoded in the differently perceived surface structures.

Reanalysis typically hinges on the interplay between the two. Reanalysis affecting morpheme boundary placement is *resegmentation*, while reanalysis of underlying syntactic structures is referred to as *reformulation*. These may occur together or separately.

Examples:

### **Boundary Reanalysis/ Rebracketing:**

‘... the cross I’d bear’            ‘the cross-eyed bear’

man-lic ‘man-like’    →    manly

an eke name            →    a nickname

Sant Heer Niclaes      →    Santa Claus

### **Underlying Structure Ambiguity:**

Visiting relations can be dangerous.

John likes reading books on volcanoes.

Special cocktails for ladies with nuts.

New Housing for Elderly Not Yet Dead

New Missouri U. Chancellor Expects Little Sex

12 on Their Way to Cruise Among Dead in Plane Crash

N.J. Judge to Rule on Nude Beach

Reagan Wins on Budget, But More Lies Ahead

Complaints About NBA Referees Growing Ugly

We need more honest politicians

Ladies are requested not to have babies in the restaurant after 6 pm

By the time he was admitted, his rapid heart had stopped, and he was feeling better.

On the second day the knee was better, and on the third day it had completely disappeared.

**Semantic Ambiguity:**

All water served here has been personally passed by the manager.

She slipped on ice, and her legs went in different directions.

- Me too!

- Me three! ☺ (homonyms)

**Oronyms:**

The good can decay many ways.

The stuffy nose is bad.

Some others I've seen.

The good candy came anyways.

The stuff he knows is bad.

Some mothers I've seen.

I scream,

You scream,

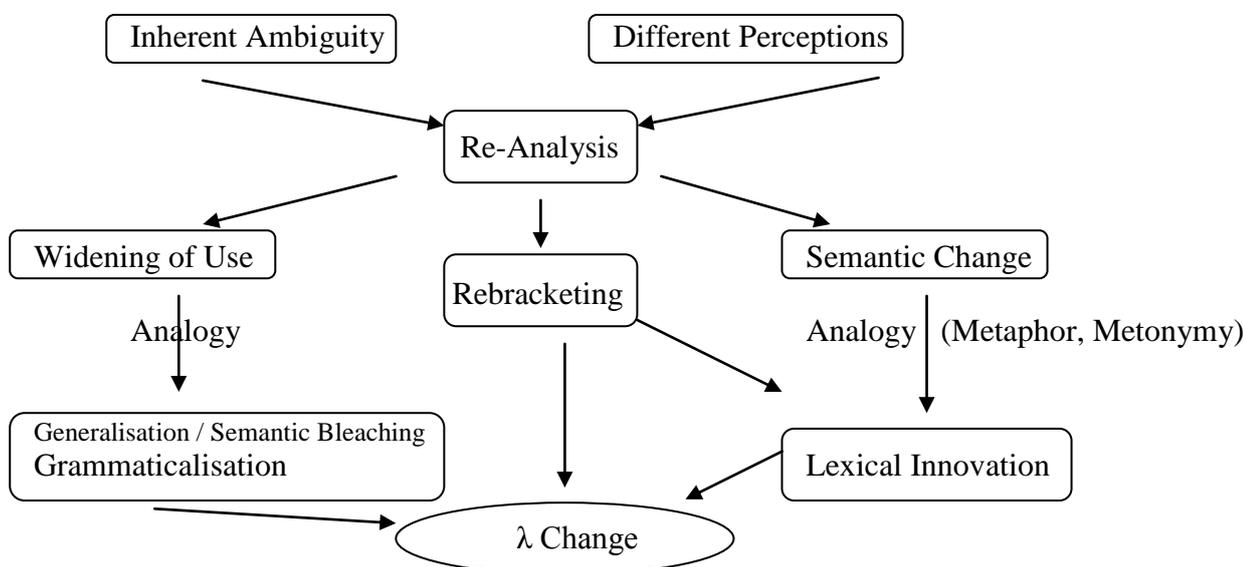
We all scream

For ice cream!

Fuzzy Wuzzy was a bear, Fuzzy Wuzzy had no hair. Fuzzy Wuzzy wasn't fuzzy, was he? ☺

He was a notor republic [notary public]

He comes from Pencil Vanea [Pennsylvania], etc.

**Diagram of some pathways of linguistic change:****The Driving Forces of Language Change: Our Anatomy and Our Minds**

“SPEECH is so familiar a feature of daily life that we rarely pause to define it. It seems as natural to man as walking, and only less so than breathing,” wrote Edward Sapir in his book *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (1921). However, he points out, while walking (or breathing, etc.), is our inborn ability, Language is not – we *learn to think symbolically* (and, therefore, speak!) in our early childhood, from people around us.

- ⇒ Symbol = form + meaning
- ⇒ Linguistic Sign = Arbitrary Symbol (with no direct link btw. form & meaning) = sound image + idea
- ⇒ Thinking = Connecting / Associating ideas;
- ⇒ We learn to connect / associate ideas through learning Language
- ⇒ Language is an abstract living structure of arbitrary symbols (Linguistic Signs) that allows us to think and share our thoughts;
- ⇒ Language exists in the minds of the speakers;
- ⇒ Language *lives* through its speakers, who collectively create it, as they use it
- ⇒ Union btw. form & idea = symbolic representation = Essence of Language = connecting forms & ideas → ideas
- ⇒ Language System = Units (Linguistic Signs) + Rules of Combination

### Sapir: λs – arbitrary systems of symbolism

“The question has often been raised whether thought is possible without speech; further, if speech and thought be not but two facets of the same psychic process” (Ibid.).

### Sapir on the relationship between Language & Thought:

“Language may be looked upon as an instrument capable of running a gamut of psychic uses. Its flow not only parallels that of the inner content of consciousness, but parallels it on different levels, ranging from the state of mind that is dominated by particular images to that in which abstract concepts and their relations are alone at the focus of attention and which is ordinarily termed reasoning. Thus the outward form only of language is constant; its inner meaning, its psychic value or intensity, varies freely with attention or the selective interest of the mind, also, needless to say, with the mind’s general development. From the point of view of language, thought may be defined as the highest latent or potential content of speech, the content that is obtained by interpreting each of the elements in the flow of language as possessed of its very fullest conceptual value. From this it follows at once that language and thought are not strictly coterminous. At best, language can but be the outward facet of thought on the highest, most generalized, level of symbolic expression. To put our viewpoint somewhat differently, language is primarily a pre-rational function. It humbly works up to the thought that is latent in, that may eventually be read into, its classifications and its forms; it is not, as is generally but naïvely assumed, the final label put upon the finished thought” (Ibid.).

→ λ has 2 aspects: psychological + physical = sound + idea (psycho-physical basis of speech)

#### **Because**

- ⇒ **Language is a social product:** we create it *collectively*, with our different “organs of speech” and our individual minds; and
- ⇒ **Language is both physical and psychological**

→ Language Variation & Change occur due to the interaction of:

- ⇒ the way we *speak* (make speech sounds with our ‘organs of speech’ – our physiology), and
- ⇒ the way we *think* (our psychology)

Phonological change (sound deletion, sound addition, etc., and assimilation) occur because of the limitations of our organs of speech (our tongues can move only that fast!)

Linguistic changes on all levels occur also because of the way we interpret (understand) the sounds we hear.

Thinking = making connections/ associations/ perceiving relationships between things/ concepts.  
The three basic types of associations we make (the 3 principles of human understanding):

- ⇒ Resemblance (Metaphor)
- ⇒ Contiguity (Metonymy – association based on closeness in space/time – not on resemblance)
- ⇒ Cause/Effect

**Metaphorical extension** occurs when a concrete lexical item is recruited to express a more abstract concept; this emptying/bleaching of lexical content is a prerequisite to grammaticalization because grammatical functions in themselves are necessarily abstract.

The 'locational' use of *going to* cannot be truncated (i.e., *shortened*) phonologically to *gonna* while the future use can:

He's gonna work hard from now on.

He's going to/(*\*gonna*) Lae tomorrow.

In **metaphor**:

There is a literal meaning and a transferred meaning.

Metaphor involves transfer, here from domain of space to domain of deictic time.

More 'concrete' meaning of *go* is more easily grasped than more abstract meaning of tense.

Metaphors, when all is said and done, are usually ambiguous, and can be understood in both literal and abstract meaning, with result of **semantic ambiguity** or **homonymy**

**Metaphor and Metonymy\***

Metonymy involves *contiguity* of some sort, either transfer of meaning from contiguous unit in the discourse, or "part for whole" usage (referring to someone as 'bigmouth' or 'brain' etc.).

\* **Metonymy - association based on contiguity in space/time – NOT on Resemblance!**

**Grammaticalization** is the result of the interaction of the three types of association (metaphor, metonymy & Cause/ Effect).