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p-ISSN: 2663-3299

e-ISSN: 2663-3841

L-ISSN: 2663-3299

Vol. V, No. IV (Fall 2020)

Pages: 19 – 26

## Language Travels through Time: Effect of Age and Environment on Linguistics Behavior

### Abstract:

*Language is also a behavior that depends on age and environment. Keeping this fact in mind, the present research investigated the correlation between two socio-demographic elements ---age and environment and linguistic fluctuation. The findings uncovered a huge relationship between people's age and environment and their stylistic features. Prominent differences were spotted in the selection of words, choice of parts of speech, grammar, concepts and themes. It concludes that young people tend to use slang, acronyms, internet centred lively expressions in their language. They are inclined to write about emotions, desires and aspirations. Old aged people like to use standardized diction, grammatically correct sentences and solemn expressions. They alienate themselves from social activities and are rather nostalgic in their themes and like to talk on wisdom. The current study will also present a few suggestions regarding language change treated, particularly on the relation with English language teaching and learning.*

### Key Words:

Linguistic Fluctuation, Socio-Demographic Elements, Stylistic Features, Psychological Insight.

### Introduction

Change is an inevitable phenomenon. The language also changes across time. Language is changed as it passes from one generation to another. Each individual contributes to this transformation. Every individual is raised differently, so he adds different linguistic features to a language. This change may appear in pronunciation, sounds, meanings and introduction of new words. This transformation comes slowly and gradually, and after a considerable time, original features of that language cannot be recognized. English too has undergone tremendous changes in respect of words, meanings, pronunciation, usage etc..English of Chaucer is quite different from that of Keats. Rather it is almost impossible to understand some words and expressions of the 14th century.

Some people say that this change in language is something negative. They opine that language is declining and changing its original form and shape. It is deteriorating with the passage of time. But it is a fact that as long as the needs of language, users continue to change ,so will the language . The English language is a work in process .change is not something unusual. .It will continue to respond to the needs of modern man.

The following section will discuss the underlying reasons as well as the process of language changes.

### Reasons for Language Change

Language is always changing and evolving. But the rate of this change in language may vary. Some people are really pleased with this transition and say that language is a continuous and ever-changing process. This process is spontaneous and fluent.

It continues through centuries and centuries. They call this process evolution and consider this change a part of the ultimate progress of language. Some linguists suggest that language changes are the result of adaptation. Man is a social animal, and language is the vehicle of social life. So people have to change it according to their

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changing needs and behaviours to get fit into society. A psycholinguist Stephen Pinker is also in favour of this theory. In his book, *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language* (2000), he says that language is an inborn quality. Man has a natural and inherent speech capacity. It becomes functional under the application of different forces from society. Language ability is triggered by the people around them. Human mental ability also plays a part in the production and use of language. So the language depends on our choice and adjustment. But Noam Chomsky has opposing ideas and says that language is not a matter of natural selection and adjustment. He says that an individual has a language acquisition device that helps him to construct his own mental grammar and that social conditions play no role in language learning. Most of the people seem to follow the first theory as [Meredith \(1998\)](#) suggests that language is an important factor of human life, and it is the means of survival in a changing world. This way language originated from England and became the lingua franca soon. People from different parts transformed its different linguistics features according to their culture and needs. [Mahoney \(2008\)](#) opines that language changes under different social, regional, economic and political factors. Every individual is different from another. Every individual has unique perceptions, assumptions, knowledge, experience and exposure. A person uses language according to his own frame of reference. This uniqueness of use leads to differences or changes in language. Because of different language experience, we all have a different set of vocabulary and different concepts of language and grammar. People pick different words and phrase from other people they interact with. Then, Mahoney also explains that children and young speakers are sources of change in language. They acquire language from the people around them. Some of them learn language imperfectly and incorrectly. They view language from different perspectives and hence use it in different ways, so their vocabulary, constructions and perceptions are different from those of the older generation. Aitchison contemplates upon language changes and says that some words and phrases just die in a language because they do not fit in a particular society or in the current times and are no more used by people. Then our society and culture are continuously changing because of technology and inventions. They result in the inclusion of new words like Google, sulfide, fax, text, what Sapp, etc. (2001). Such things did not exist some years back. It is a usual fear that our language English is declining and losing its prestigious place. But the fact is that it is actually adapting to keep pace with the advancements of the modern world, during the last two centuries. The English speaking community has developed significantly. So is the case with language. It is simply flexing and growing with new trends. Some people feel annoyed when others do not follow Standard English and its rules and regulations. Here David Crystal says that language is dynamic, and it changes its vocabulary pronunciation and usage with the passage of time.

### **Brief History of English Language**

English, a West Germanic language, belongs to the Indo-European languages. It is closely related to Frisian, German and Dutch. Anglo Frisian dialects were brought to Britain in the mid of 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD by Anglo Saxon tribes who came from northwest Germany, southern Denmark and the Netherlands. Their language is called old English which shows the traces of varied origins of Anglo Saxon kingdoms established in different regions of Britain. Old English was significantly influenced by North Germanic languages which were spoken by Scandinavian Vikings who captured Britain. The Anglian dialects have a considerable impact on English.

In the Middle English period, Normans conquered Britain and brought with them new stimuli. In that age, French was used by the elite class, Latin was used by clergymen and English was thrown to the background. Slowly and gradually, Normans were absorbed by the natives and external stimuli inspired local people. English adopted many words from the French language, especially from the field of law, arts and religion. It is said that 45% of words of English language have French origin including 'Joyful', 'parenthood', 'ice cream', ([Finnegan et al., 1992, p. 283](#)). The beauty industry in England also borrowed many words from French like a marketplace, petticoat, jewel etc. Then another striking transition in English brought about French was the introduction of plural ending 's' instead of "en" in English. So plural of the book became 'books' instead of 'broken' ([Mastin, 2011](#)). During The Hundred Year War, English regained its importance because the users of this language rose to a higher status in society. In Anglo-Norman English, all the consonant letters were given

sound, and no consonant was considered to be silent like in the word “ Knowledge”, K was not silent. (Mahoney, 2008). In the case of Spelling, the ending “e” was also pronounced like in “House” “e” was pronounced. (Mastin, 2011). Then Chaucer is rightly called the father of English language and literature. He found the English language a brick and left it marble. English underwent different variations. During this period. Many old grammatical rules became simple, and rather some vanished altogether. Nouns, adjectives and verbs became very simple in use. In that age, we see the transition in the use of long vowels. They were pronounced higher in the mouth. This change in pronunciation resulted in the change of Spelling, so the word “Here” changed its Spelling and became “heart”. (Mastin, 2011). In the Renaissance period, words in the English language were continuously evolving and developing. Vocabulary in that period was expanding. Actually, the writers of those periods created new words and used them in their writings. Shakespeare is praised for adding almost 2000 words to the English language. Then in that era, words were taken up from other languages like Latin and Greek. These languages were considered to be the languages of great writers and geniuses. This adoption of words from other languages was also because of social contact with other nations on account of trade and commerce. Several words used in the Elizabethan period are no more in use. We can have the example of many words that have become extinct now. Gong is a word that has been replaced with Dung. The Elizabethan English had 24 alphabets instead of 26. The letter U was never used in the beginning of the words, rather was used in the middle and V was used at the beginning of the word. Different letters like J, and I, U and V were considered to be the same. In olden times, sentence structure was the same as these days subject-verb-object. To our great surprise, ‘to be’ was used instead of “have,” e.g. “He has come” was written as “He comes”. Then the verbs that now have ‘s’, ‘es’ at the end-users to have ‘eth,’ e.g. “Goeth”, “Playeth”. In that Era, Shakespeare’s contribution to the English language is enormous. He enhanced English vocabulary and phrases which made this language enriched. Shakespeare was the master of the art of coinage. He adopted many words from Latin and modified them according to the needs of the time. Then Shakespeare contributed to make the English language a standardized language. His words and phrases were widely used by people. Shakespeare, the important literary figure, played with words and rules of grammar. He, in his plays, often converted nouns into verbs. There is incredible potency of vocabulary used by Shakespeare in his works. His contribution to the English language is richest. He used unique words in his plays like Courtship, Weird, Fretful, Assassination, Watchdog, Housekeeping, Fashionable, Addiction etc. Shakespeare expresses his artistic thoughts through unique and expressive words. There are some phrases of Shakespeare which are used extensively in our daily lives. “Fair is foul, foul is fair”, “All the glitters is not gold”, “To be or not to be”, “Fair play”, “All’s well that ends well”. Shakespeare’s contribution to English morphology is great. He developed new words by adding prefix “un” like “unvalued”, “unavoided”, “not”. A number of new words were formed by adding French prefix “en” or “em” like “endeared”, “emprison”. Shakespeare also extended the meanings of some words like “Charm” which formerly had meanings “popular”, but later it meant “magical power” (Mastin, 2011). English dictionary came into existence after the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It guided the users of the English language about the exact meanings of words, their sounds and correct usage. The first reliable dictionary was compiled by Samuel Johnson. That dictionary was considered to be the broadest in scope. After the publication of the Oxford, dictionary brought a revolution in the field. New words were added to the English language with the rise in trade, commerce and industrialization. Later, new words were added to the English language as culture interact, mix and trade. Language undergoes transformation to accommodate these changes. The Industrial Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century had a profound effect on the English language. New words were created for new products, machines and processes .e.g. train, engine, reservoir, pulley, piston, electricity, camera., ambulance etc. At the same time, old words were given entirely new meanings, e.g. Vacuum, Cylinder, Factory, Horsepower etc. After the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Britain rose to be the most developed and powerful country with many colonies. This British colonization led to the adoption of many foreign words. All these factors converged to create modern English. Now 20% of the earth’s population speak English. However, most of those people are not native speakers. English has become the most studied foreign language in the world. Around 250 million people speak English in America. There are many differences

between American English and British English in respects of vocabulary, pronunciation and meanings ([Mastin, 2011](#)).

### Old and New English

Certes, he jakkes Straw and he his meynee  
Ne made never shouted half so shrille  
When that they wolden any flemyng kille,  
As thilke days was made upon the fox. (Nun's priest's Tale)

Chaucer, the pioneer of English language and literature, was acquainted with the fact that the language of his works was substantially different from that of his predecessors. At the beginning of his career, English was unsettled and fluid. Chaucer used East Midland dialect of English in his works, and this very dialect was used for literary expressions. Later that dialect took the status of Standard English. Even that refined and settled English is not easily understood by today's reader. Words and expression are unusual and unfamiliar. We are not comfortable with that strange language. Today's English is comprehensible for us. But some linguists do not appreciate these changes in language. They say that language has been spoiled. They conclude that this transition is behind the fact that we all do not speak the same and uniform language today ([Anderson & Trudgill, 1990](#)). It is not true that our language is degenerating fast. Language change is something healthy and natural process. English can be changed but cannot die as long as spoken by people. Variations in language among different groups are normal and usual. Speakers use a variety of speech and styles to move with the changing social conditions. Man is making progress by leaps and bounds, and he has to create words for new technology, new inventions, new conditions, new problems etc. ([Leith, 2003, p. 74](#)). According to some people, the meanings of wicked and bad are not negative anymore. ([Mastin, 2011](#)). This variation in meanings is not something to worry about. In the beginning, a word had a single and limited meaning. But slowly and gradually, different people add different suggestive meanings to that word. In this way, meanings of words change with the passage of time and are accepted by people. ([Anderson & Trudgill, 1990](#); [Burridge, 2002](#)). The world is changing in many different ways, and we need to speak about it confidently. Now the needs of speakers have changed. New technology and new products require new words to refer to. Today's young generation is employing new words that suit their needs and conditions. ([Finnegan et al., 1992, p. 231](#)). Changes in language seem to be quick and rapid during recent years because advancements in science are very fast. A new generation has to create new words to compete with an ever-changing world. New technology like the internet, computers, laptop, I pods need new words. (<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/>). English has become richer than before. Now it has vast vocabulary than ever before. It can express varied experiences with exact words and expressions. It has developed through different ages encompassing all the characteristics and changes of those ages. Rather, it can be said that it has refined itself with every passing day. Today's English is more rich, developed and refined. (1992, p., 198).

### The Effect of Society and Culture on Language Change

Language is a means of communication between people. Language is not a sealed system which has nothing to do with external factors. Language is not just subject to its rules and concepts. Language is an indispensable part of society. In a society, different people use language in different ways according to their needs. Language is meant to be connected with people. For this purpose, they try to use words and expressions accepted in society. [Aitchison \(2003\)](#) opines that language changes because we try to copy the people around us and reason behind this is the desire to be connected with others ([Aitchison, 2003, p. 164](#)). We adopt different pronunciations to look alike. If we pronounce a word differently from others, then this feels to be odd. So, we adopt the pronunciation of people around us. It is called speech accommodation ([Mackinnon, 2002, p. 340](#)) even the native or original speakers of English differ in pronunciation, vocabulary, phrases used, suggestive meanings etc. We see a significant variation in the pronunciation of Britishers and Americans ([Kirkpatrick,](#)

[2007, p. 58](#)). Language is not all about the words and sentences. It also depends on the social context and communicative intentions of the speaker. People use words and expressions which are widely accepted; the meanings are recognized when they are used in a particular context ([Anderson & Trudgill, 1990, p. 167](#)). Sometimes language is a source of confusion because it leads to various interpretations. In order to be clear and exact, speaker and listener must share assumptions and expectations. Even the language of the same community differs and depend upon gender, profession and status. Young people often use slang in their speech like word “Bucks” is used instead of “Dollars”, and “Hunk” is replaced by “Hottie”. Young speakers even tend to use taboo terms. Such changes may be frustrating for old generation [Leith, D. \(2003\)](#).

People choose their language according to context, purpose, audience and situation. If their conversational partner is familiar to them, they tend to use informal language (Burridge, 2002). Every region and society has its own accepted and familiar vocabulary. And people are inclined to give suggested meanings to the words that may be specific only to that region and situation. A computer illiterate person would be amazed to know that “Driver” means software that contains instructions ([Crystal, 2010](#)). English is different in different countries and regions. It has taken local colours and influences. People add different terms and expressions to English according to their culture. In Pakistan, we see that many words from Islamic culture have been added to English. Like Eid, Fatwa, Hadith, Quran.

### **English and Modern Era.**

It is a fact that technology affects language. Internet has forced language to expand its vocabulary. The digital age is changing the way of interaction. These days. All the new inventions with unique names and uses have made English. Language is rich and fertile. Language is always evolving, but technology and science accelerate the rate of change. Technology needs new nouns to describe new applications and its products like motherboard, modem, laptop, desktop etc ([Crystal, 2001](#)). Mastic (2011) also mentions this thing and says that digital devices add a lot of jargon vocabulary words like “Bytes”, “Binary”. Blogs, Web, etc. “Google” has become the word of the decade. Technology also adds meanings to existing words that they did not have before like Mouse, Keyboard, and Explorer etc. This digital era has also changed some nouns into verbs. These days it is usual to say, “I texted you yesterday”, or someone declares, “I googled you”. Then young people have also added a lot to the English language, e.g. LOL( laugh out loud) OMG( Oh my God), Swag (stylish), Bro( brother).([Farina & Liddy, 2011](#)). The young generation has changed the form and original shape of the English language. This thing has never happened in the history of the development of language. Now people do not care about the construction of sentences, their meanings, their Spelling etc. “How are you?” can be written as “How r u?”. Friend has become “Buddy” and husband has become “Hubby”. Now the word “Date” is used for “Courting” instead of using in the traditional way. ([Crystal, 2006](#)). Three days, The mobile phone users tend to use abbreviations and short forms to save their time and energy, e.g.” Cu again” . Then “as soon as possible” has become “Asap” and “no problem” is written as “NP” . Then people combine letters and numbers in the message, e.g. “wai8.”.Spelling has also undergone a change . Young people use the word “ plz” instead of please,” N” instead of “and”, “Bcz” instead of “because” ([Farina & Lyddy, 2011](#)) Now people have become more expressive than ever before. They use faces, signs and even alphabets to display their feelings. If they want to express their anger, they may add an angry face in conversation. Some people are not happy with these variations. They say that standard English is going to be extinct. They are afraid that after some years, the present English would have become a different language. But it is not true; English is a dynamic language. The judgements about someone’s language are not justified. .It just shows the prejudice of the judge. Standard English is only a dialect that is spoken by 15% British people. No other dialect should be called sloppy, lazy and wrong. Nonstandard English is just equal to Standard English.

### **Conclusion**

Some people conclude that English is declining and losing its quality, but it is not justified. Change is life, and stagnation is death. Without change, a thing can not grow. Same is the case with language. It changes with the

passage of time. Pronunciations evolve, new words are borrowed and invented, the meanings of old words change etc. ([Aitchison, 2001](#)).

It is an undeniable fact that. English has changed a lot. We no more have “Thee”, “Thou”, “Thy” and some other grammatical structures. But it is really difficult to conclude whether English has improved or declined. Some linguists are of the opinion that English must be spoken in a particular way. They say so when they compare standard English with other dialects. Usually, a country has some dialects that vary in vocabulary, grammar or pronunciation from one other. Among these social dialects, one is prestigious and known as the standard language. Standard English has the highest status, and it is based on the vocabulary, grammar and constructions of native speakers of English. It is used in books, media and government. It is taught through textbooks, dictionaries and grammar. It is a fact that we need to learn Standard English and it would be really helpful to communicate on formal occasions like job interviews, meetings, formal discussions etc. But slang or informal language can be used when talking to a friend or a neighbour. Rules and regulations of English can be thrown to winds when used in an informal context.

It is quite true that textbooks and teachers are teaching English as they have been doing in the past, but social networking applications like Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram etc. are the major causes that English has lost its original form.

Some linguists are quite wrong when they say that people are drifting away from English. Change in language is natural. Language must fulfil the growing and changing needs of people. It is a fact that technology and science have made English more rich and flexible. Technology has changed the way we interact and communicate. We are connected to one another by Emails, text messaging, etc. So technology, with its advancements, has rendered new words to the English language. These variations must be welcomed with open arms because they are making English an adaptable and pliant language.

Different countries and nations have adapted English according to their cultures, trends and needs. So today, it is spoken and understood by almost 840 million people in the world, and it has attained the position of a lingua franca. English has got this strong position because of its dynamic and ever-changing nature.

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