

LANGUAGE CHANGE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work titled ‘Language Change in the English Language’ has been graded and duly approved as meeting part of the requirements for the award of Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) Degree in the Department of Linguistics Studies, University of Benin.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated, first, to God Almighty, the original source of inspiration for this work. It is greatly through his grace that my time in this institution has been worthwhile and successful.

This work is also dedicated to my parents, Mr Ikechukwu Amah and Mrs Dorothy Amah, whose financial, emotional and spiritual support I have relied on throughout my educational journey. Their belief in the necessity of hard work in all aspects of my life, have influenced and pushed me till this day.

Lastly, this work is dedicated to the entirety of the Edeoghon, Amah and Akhigbe family.

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ABSTRACT

This work examines language change in the English language. It will provide an overview of the English language. This work will give a timeline of the English language with concentration on potential social factors that influenced changes in English. The objective of this research is to create a source document that contains a look into the diachronic and synchronic change of the English language. It is intended to examine the linguistic changes; that have occurred on the language. This work is intended to encourage acceptance of new forms in the English language as these changes are a constant in language growth. The framework used includes the lexical, morphological, phonological, syntactic and semantic analysis of the English language from its recorded beginning. The data for this work was collected via a study of already existing documentation and the researcher's knowledge on the topic in question. On the basis of this researcher's findings, it was observed that the various types of English language are used in different levels of communication and also in different mediums; of communication. It was also observed that even though certain types of English are the standard, some 'non-standard' types are spoken as an L1 and are picking up traction towards standardisation.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of study

This research is a comparative analysis of the various forms of use of the English language across time and location. The comparative analysis here will involve the differences in English use either in morphology, phonetics, syntax, semantics and overall lexicon across time and location. This is known as language change.

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

These changes can be branched in relation to changes over time or changes across geographic locations. The branch of linguistics that is expressly concerned with changes in a language (or in languages) over time is historical linguistics (also known as diachronic linguistics). The branch of linguistics that is expressly concerned with the changes in languages across geographic locations is known as synchronic linguistics

There are a few different ways languages change; it might be helpful to separate them into external and internal factors.

By external factors, I mainly mean language contact. The most obvious thing that language contact does is spread words between languages. English, for instance, is a prolific borrower, taking in words from all sorts of languages – although by far the biggest source is French, reflecting the historic political connections between France and England. This can also be seen in the majority of English words being founded in German Lexicon. A less obvious impact of contact is grammatical change.

Internal factors are what the original focus of historical linguistics was on. The main internal factors are regular sound change, and analogical remodeling. Regular sound change is an observation that, in a defined speech community over a particular period of time, all instances of a particular sound in a particular sound environment change to another sound. Evidence of this can be seen where a speech community has split and one has undergone the change but the other has not. For instance, in the comparison of the standard American pronunciation (rounding) of the 'r' sound after a short vowel sound to the standard British pronunciation: Using the word 'bar' as an example, the American pronunciation uses a hard 'r' while the British version lengthens the vowel instead. This geographic variation can be seen in other words including water, cart, lard etc.

1.2 Methodology

The data collected for this research include both oral and written data. The oral data collection was done by listening to records of use of the natural language in a non-controlled environment, to perceive frequency and fluency of use. The written data was collected from books on the topics discussed in this study and also literary works that different variation of language use (that is different revisions to appeal to the latest form of English use).

1.3 Statement of the problem

In the topic of language change there is often debate on acceptability, that is, the new or upcoming forms of the language, are often seen as corrupt, improper or even referred to as slang . This is noticed especially in the lexical look into language change. Whether in the formation of words or the change in the meaning of a word, deliberation is to when a word or expression is said to be an acceptable form of the natural language or said to be slang i.e. is this term generally acceptable.

This usually happens because the users of this language don't see the standardization of these so called new forms (since language change takes hundreds or thousands of years to happen)

In this research therefore, it will be seen that even the English spoken now was once look down on. I seek to show the progress of these changes, by providing ample data and displaying historical efforts on this topic

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The aim of this research is to:

- show that linguistic changes have occurred overtime in the English language in relation to several branches of linguistics.
- encourage acceptance of new forms in the English language as these changes are a constant in language growth.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research works attempts to give a clearer understanding of the English language, how its movement led to its current popularity and the changes that have occurred to lead t the current forms of English.

This research work attempts to:

- Make an extension of knowledge based on previous studies due to the widespread nature of the English language across social, economic, cultural, financial and political circles.

- Give a better look into the etymology of words
- Give understanding of how language changes become widespread and semi-permanent.

Hopefully, this research work will serve as a relevant research material to others who intend to explore language change and other related topics.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Several presentations of language change can be seen in day to day experiences. Language change can be presented through three generations of users of a specific language, or even dialectal/idiolectal variations within relatively small language populations. This shows that everyday people either have a passing knowledge of language change, or a passing interaction with a huddle of subtle language changes.

These observations prompted scholars within the field of linguistics, to pursue this as sub-branches of linguistics. These sub- branches are diachronic linguistics (historical linguistics) and synchronic linguistics. Although historical linguistics was speculated upon In the Renaissance, in the comparative study of Greek and Latin (these were speculations on the ancestry of the world's languages). It was only in the 19th century, however, that there were more scientific methods of language comparison and sufficient data on the early Indo-European languages. By the 20th century, historical linguists have successfully extended the application of the theories and methods of the 19th century to the classification and historical study of non-Indo-European languages. These same methods have been used to study current European languages (French, English, Spanish, and Italian etc.).

2.1 Conceptual review

In order to delve deeper into the topic that is language change in the English language, certain concepts have to be explain. Related literature and literary works from scholars and researchers on the topic have been consulted to draft the essentials of these concepts. This section will contain the definitions and (or) explanations of the concepts, terms, and terminologies used in this study. Some of these terminologies include:

- (i) The English Language
- (ii) Language Change
- (iii) Forms of language change
- (iv) Factors affecting language change

2.1.1 The English Language

The English language is a West Germanic language of the Indo-European language family. English belongs to the Indo-European family of languages and is therefore related to most other languages spoken in Europe and western Asia. The parent tongue, called Proto-Indo-European, was spoken about 5,000 years ago by nomads believed to have roamed the southeast European plains. Germanic, one of the language groups descended from this ancestral speech, is usually divided by scholars into three regional groups: East (Burgundian, Vandal, and Gothic - all

extinct), North (Icelandic, Faroese, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish), and West (German, Dutch [and Flemish], Frisian, and English). Though closely related to English, German remains far more conservative than English in its retention of a fairly elaborate system of inflections. Frisian, spoken by the inhabitants of the Dutch province of Friesland and the islands off the west coast of Schleswig, is the language most nearly related to Modern English. Icelandic, which has changed little over the last thousand years, is the living language most nearly resembling Old English in grammatical structure.

English originated in England which had its different timeline related forms (Old English, Middle English and Modern English). After the Norman Conquest in 1066, French became the predominant language in England, thus creating what is known now as Middle English. Although Middle English was largely fragmented and improvised, Early Modern English underwent a standardization process. In 1439, Johannes Gutenberg invented the modern printing press - this required an agreed-upon and standardized form of English(the form chosen was based on the London dialect). Early Modern English soon grew, and dictionary creators, writers, and the government all began using and sharing this new standardized version of English. From the 17th century, Modern English began to spread, and in 1607 the first British settlers arrived in the United States, bringing Modern English with them. By the end of the 18th century, The British Empire had facilitated the further

spread of Modern English to places such as Africa, India, Australia, and Southeast Asia, through colonization and geopolitical dominance. By the 1920s, the British Empire had spread Modern English to a quarter of the world. Over the years, Early Modern English underwent a simplification process (e.g., simpler syntax and removal of many inflections), and, by the late 18th century, English looked a lot like how it looks today.

Today, English is spoken worldwide with differing vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Each dialect is considered a version of Late Modern English or Present Day English and should arguably not be considered any more or less correct than any other form of English. Its present form (Modern English) is the dominant language of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and various island nations in the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. It is also an official language of India, the Philippines, Singapore, and its dominance spans continents as it is spoken as an official language in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa. English is the first choice of foreign language in most other countries of the world, and it is that status that has given it the position of a global lingua franca. It is estimated that about a third of the world's population, some two billion persons, now use English (both as an L1 and L2).

2.1.1.1 Old English

Old English, otherwise known as Anglo-Saxon English, was brought to Britain in the 5th century by the Anglo-Saxons (migrants from Northern Europe), where it was spoken and written from 450 CE to 1150. Old English had a mainly Germanic vocabulary and was very different from the English we know today.

2.1.1.2 Middle English

The term Middle English refers to the everyday language spoken and written in Britain during the years 1100 and 1500. This period saw significant changes in English, primarily due to the Norman (Vikings who came from the North of France) conquest of Britain in 1066.

2.1.1.3 Modern English

Modern English is often divided into two sections; Early Modern English (the 1500s-1700s) and Late or Contemporary Modern English (1700s - today). The Great Vowel Shift (1400-1700) occurred between the movements from Middle English to Modern English. The plays and poems of William Shakespeare were written in Early Modern English. The term Modern English describes the English used from the 1600s to today. Modern English is often divided into two sections; Early Modern English (the 1600s-1700s) and Late or Contemporary Modern English (1700s - today). Old English (Anglo-Saxon English) and Middle English serve as the basis for Modern English. Modern English contains Germanic,

Romance, and Greek vocabulary, as well as loan words from other modern languages.

Early Modern English looked very similar to today's English but still sounded slightly different. Although Early Modern English might sound a little strange to the ear today, we would still be able to understand it. Late Modern English, as we know it today, evolved from Early Modern English. We typically consider 'late' or 'contemporary' to be the use of English from the 1800s onwards. The most recent stage in the evolution of the language is commonly called Present-Day English (PDE). There are arguments for a further stage in the language, which began around 1945 and is referred to as 'World English' or 'Global English' reflecting the globalization of English as an international lingua franca.

The main change from Early to Late English was the vocabulary, as the spelling, pronunciation, and grammar largely remained the same.

2.1.2 Language Change

Language is always changing. Language changes across space and across social group. Language also varies across time. This topic cuts across two sub-branches of linguistics. The first one being, Synchronic linguistics, and the other Diachronic linguistics (historical linguistics).

Synchronic literally means with-time, though etymology is misleading here, since Saussure's term describes atemporal linguistics; 'linguistics which proceeds without time, which abstracts away from the effects of the ages and studies language at a given, frozen moment.'(Randy Allen Harris 1993)

'Diachronic literally means across-time, and it describes any work which maps the shifts and mutations of languages over the centuries.' (Randy Allen Harris 1993)

In the modern world, language change is often seen as socially problematic. During the slow process of language change, subtle differences are often unintelligible and could lead to inefficiencies in communication. Also, as people observe language change, they usually react negatively with notions of impropriety. Language change is often seen as functionally disadvantageous, in that it hinders communication, and it is also negatively evaluated by socially dominant groups. Nevertheless it is a universal fact of human history.

2.1.2.1 Synchronic Linguistics

Synchronistic linguistics is often descriptive, analyzing how the parts of a language or grammar work together in a specific time frame (often seen as independent of the touch of time). It could also involve the analysis the differences between dialects of a language (these dialects must be spoken at the same time period). The term was coined by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure to distinguish between

the study of a static language and one that is evolving. Synchronistic views look at a language as if it's static and not changing. Studies of "dead" languages can be synchronic, as by definition they are no longer spoken or evolving and are frozen in time(for example Latin).

Colleen Elaine Donnelly (1994, as cited Afeef Tahir Butt) states that, "A synchronic study of language is a comparison of languages or dialects—various spoken differences of the same language used within some defined spatial region and during the same period of time," (Colleen Elaine Donnelly, 1994)

It could involve determining the parts of the English speaking region in which people currently say 'chips' rather than 'fries' and 'lift' rather than 'elevator'.

The study of synchronic linguistics lays the foundation for the study of diachronic linguistics. The collection of language data from a particular time is further used for the comparative analyses in diachronic linguistics.

2.1.2.2 Diachronic Linguistics and Historical Linguistics

Historical linguistics (Diachronic Linguistics), is the branch of linguistics concerned with the study of phonological, grammatical (syntax), and semantic changes of a language over time. It involves the reconstruction of earlier stages of languages, in order to discover and apply the methods by which genetic relationships among languages can be demonstrated.

“Language change is one of the subjects of historical linguistics, the subfield of linguistics that studies language in its historical aspects. Sometimes the term diachronic linguistics is used instead of historical linguistics, as a way of referring to the study of language (or languages) at various points in time and at various historical stages.”(Adrian Akmajian et al, 2001)

2.1.3 Synchronic vs. Diachronic Approaches

Synchronic linguistics is one of the two main temporal dimensions of language study introduced by Saussure in his "Course in General Linguistics" (1916). The other is diachronic linguistics. Before Saussure, it was considered that the only true scientific study of a language could be diachronic, but both approaches are useful. The first looks at a snapshot of a language, and the other studies its evolution (like a frame of film vs. a movie).

For example, analyzing the word order in a sentence in Old English only would be a study in synchronistic linguistics. If you looked at how word order changed in a sentence from Old English to Middle English and now to modern English would be a diachronic study.

"As it is necessary to know how a system works at any given time before one can hope to understand changes, the analysis of language at a single point in time, i.e.

synchronic linguistics, now usually precedes the study in terms of diachronic linguistics." (Paul Georg Meyer et al., 2005)

2.2 Types of Language change

In reality, diachronic and synchronic linguistics are interwoven. Both synchronic and diachronic linguistics involve the study of changes in languages from the smallest linguistic element to the largest linguistic element. These elements and their level of changes will be discussed below:

2.2.1 Phonetic and phonological changes (sound change)

Sound change is the change in the pronunciation of phones or phonemes. It can lead to phonological change (i.e., change in the relationships between phonemes within the structure of a language). For example, if the pronunciation of one phoneme changes to become identical to that of another phoneme, the two original phonemes can merge into a single phoneme, reducing the total number of phonemes the language contains.

Certain common types of sound change, most notably assimilation and dissimilation, can be explained, at least partially, in terms of syntagmatic, or contextual conditioning.

Assimilation: this is the process by which one sound is made similar in its place or manner of articulation to a neighboring sound. It is divided into two types: total and partial. For example, the word “cupboard” was presumably once pronounced, as the spelling indicates; with the consonant cluster ‘pb’ in the middle. The ‘p’ was assimilated to ‘b’ in manner of articulation (i.e., voicing was maintained throughout the cluster), and subsequently the resultant double consonant ‘bb’ was simplified. With a single b in the middle and an unstressed second syllable, the word “cupboard,” as it is pronounced nowadays, is no longer so evidently a compound of “cup” and “board” as its spelling still shows it to have been.

Dissimilation: this refers to the process by which one sound becomes different from a neighboring sound. A special case of dissimilation is haplology, in which the second of the two identical or similar syllables is dropped. An example is the common pronunciation of “library” as if it were written “libry.”

Metathesis: this involves the change in order of two adjacent sounds. The Modern English ‘bird’ is an example, as it used to be ‘brid’ (Old English). Not all “vowel + r” words changed the relative order of these segments as happened with ‘bird’.

In contrast to assimilation and dissimilation changes classified under metathesis tend to occur more sporadically, i.e., to affect individual words.

Lenition: this refers to a sound change that alters consonants when they appear between vowels. This change involves two principle processes; stops become continuants and voiceless consonants become voiced. For example, in certain varieties of American English, the flap /t/ as in ‘wait’ [weɪt] becomes sonorous in its present continuous form ‘waiting’ [ˈweɪtɪŋ].

Merger: this is the change of two different sounds to become the same sound (or at least to be produced as one indistinguishable sound. An example would be the pronunciation of the words, ‘father’ and ‘farther’. Many English dialects would pronounce these words, the same way (due to the r-dropping phenomena). Thus, merging the /ɑ/ and the /r/ sound, in the word ‘farther’. Merger and split can be seen as the mirror image of each other.

Splits: these are rarer than mergers, and usually arise when a formerly conditioned alternation loses the environment that provided the original conditioning, and the previously conditioned alternation becomes two independent sounds that contrast with each other. This is basically what happened when /f/ and /v/ split in English (/v/ having previously been an alternate of /f/ when /f/ occurred in an intervocalic position).

Loss: this involves the loss of a sound from a language. Syncope and apocope are the loss of medial and final sounds respectively. Middle English ‘tame’ in the past

tense was /temede/. It lost both its medial and final vowels to become Modern English /teymd/. These are usually conditioned changes that do not involve loss of the same sound elsewhere.

Prothesis and Epenthesis: these are the introduction of additional sounds, initially and medially respectively.

2.2.2 Lexical change

This involves either the change in the meaning of a word or the addition of words as a whole. The English language over time has also re-combined and recycled words to create new meanings. Some of the processes of Lexical change include

Derivation: This involves the addition of certain affixes to words to make new words. This addition of affixes usually changes the word class of the word. For example, the word ‘appreciate’ is a verb when the suffix ‘ation’ is added to the word, it become a noun. A similar thing happens to the word ‘long’ which is an adjective but becomes a verb, when the prefix ‘pro’ is added to it.

Blending: This is the combination of parts of two words to form one word. This new word encompasses the meaning of the two former segments. For example, brotherly + romance = bromance or cybernetic + organism = cyborg.

Compounding: This is the combination of two words to form a new word. This word formation process usually involves quantifying and qualifying modifiers. For example, coat-rack, bus-driver, sunset e.t.c

Backformation: This is the formation of new words by removing supposed affixes from words. Often times, this is the shortening of words from longer words or vice versa. For example the word ‘statistics’ came from the original word ‘statistic’ (which was assumed to be singular in recent times). Another example would be the word ‘television’ which was reduced to ‘televise’.

Borrowing: This is borrowing of words or expressions from other languages. Throughout its history English has not only borrowed words from other languages

2.2.3 Morphological changes (Spelling changes)

Standardisation of spelling came about relatively recently. The significant differences in the morphology of previous eras of the English language can be linked to the fact that the pre-print era had fewer literate people. Differences in spelling are often noticed when a text from a previous century is read since languages lacked fixed systems of orthography, and whatever handwritten work was distributed, showed words spelt according to regional pronunciation and to personal preference.

2.2.4 Semantic change

Semantic changes are shifts in the meanings of existing words. After words enter a language, their meanings can change, there can also be a shift in the valence of its connotations. Words' meanings may also change in terms of the depth of their semantic domain. Some changes in the meaning of words are caused by their habitual use in particular contexts. This can be seen with a word like 'girl' which used to be the word for any young child, but now is used for young female children.

Basic types of semantic change include:

Pejoration: this is a change in which a term's connotations become more negative. As an example, when "villain" entered English it meant 'peasant' or 'farmhand', but acquired the connotation 'low-born' or 'scoundrel', and today only the negative use survives.

Amelioration: this is a change in which a term's connotations become more positive. As an example, the word "wicked" is undergoing amelioration in colloquial contexts, shifting from its original sense of 'evil', to the much more positive one as of 2009 of 'brilliant'.

Both pejoration and amelioration, are known as semantic shift. They however consider connotations (from good to bad and vice versa).

Broadening: this is a change in which a term acquires additional potential uses. For example, the word ‘dog’ itself has been broadened from its Old English root 'dogge', the name of a particular breed, to become the general term for all domestic canines

Narrowing: this is a change in which a term's potential uses are restricted. For example, in old English, the word ‘meat’ which could refer to any food but in modern English, it refers to a specific type of food.

2.2.5 Syntactic changes

Syntactic change is the evolution of the syntactic structure of a natural language. It can also involve the change in word order of a sentence (such as the English language’s use of subject-verb-object)

A language can acquire a grammatical distinction that it did not have previously, such as when English developed the progressive (“He is running”) in contrast to the simple present (“He runs”). It can also lose a distinction; e.g., modern spoken French has lost the distinction between the simple past (Il marcha “he walked”) and the perfect (Il a marché “he has walked”).

This can also be manifested, in the flexibility of function of a word class. This can be seen in the use of nouns as verbs and vice versa. This is however, limited to certain word classes and might need alterations for others.

2.3 Factors Affecting Language Change

Although it is clear that changes in languages occur (since clear records; scientific or otherwise exist), it is less clear what exact circumstances lead to these changes (since records exist but are largely social speculations). However, a range of influential factors have been greatly considered to be involved in the language change process. The important thing to remember about change is that, as long as people are using a language, that language will undergo some change.

"There are many factors influencing the rate at which language changes, including the attitudes of the speakers toward borrowing and change. When a particular pronunciation or word or grammatical form or turn of phrase is regarded as more desirable, or marks its users as more important or powerful, then it will be adopted and imitated more rapidly than otherwise."(Harriet Joseph Ottenheimer, 2009)

"We can begin by dividing proposed causes of change into two broad categories. On the one hand, there are external sociolinguistic factors — that is, social factors outside the language system. On the other hand, there are internal psycholinguistic ones — that is, linguistic and psychological factors which reside in the structure of the language and the minds of the speakers."(Jean Aitchison, 2001)

External factors are predominantly sociolinguistic. They occur through multiple languages or dialects interaction, often leading to transfer or influence of language

features from one to the other. Language change can be influenced by the following: Language contact, Language learning, Social differentiation and Natural process of usage.

2.3.1 Language Contact

Language contact occurs when speakers of two or more languages or varieties interact and influence each other. The study of language contact is called contact linguistics. When speakers of different languages interact closely, it is typical for their languages to influence each other. Language contact can occur at language borders, between adstratum languages, or as the result of migration, with an intrusive language acting as either a superstratum or a substratum.

Migration, conquest and trade bring speakers of one language into contact with speakers of another language. Some individuals will become fully bilingual as children, while others learn a second language more or less well as adults. In such contact situations, languages often borrow words, sounds, constructions and so on.

Language contact occurs in a variety of phenomena, including language convergence, borrowing and relexification. The common products include pidgins, creoles, code-switching, and mixed languages.

2.3.2 Language Learning

Language is transformed as it is transmitted from one generation to the next. Each individual must re-create a grammar and lexicon based on input received from parents, older siblings and other members of the speech community. The variation of the input of a language's form and format leads to the creation of an idiolect which, may not be in line with one of the learner's language sources. However, a bias in the learning process - for instance, towards regularization (this can involve the restriction of certain languages and language forms) - will cause systematic drift, generation by generation. In addition, random differences may spread and become 'fixed', especially in small populations.

2.3.3 Social Differentiation

Social groups adopt distinctive norms of conduct, appearance, expression and so forth; language is part of the package. Linguistic distinctiveness can be achieved through vocabulary (slang or jargon), pronunciation, morphological processes, syntactic constructions, and so on.

"linguistic change can be said to have taken place when a new linguistic form, used by some sub-group within a speech community, is adopted by other members of that community and accepted as the norm." (Jennifer Coates, 1992).

Social factors that can affect language use and in the long run lead to significant language change include: context, speaker's /writer's age, gender, culture and other social influences (class, race, nationality e.t.c).

2.3.4 Context

The context in which a speaker or writer expresses ideas, has an influence on the language variation or choice of words and expressions. Thus, it's no surprise that English learners choose different language variations depending on where they are or who they speak or write for. Context of use can influence vocabulary, pronunciation, and even the format (abbreviation).

2.3.5 User's Age

Age can determine how language users express themselves, especially in the comparison between children and adult. The use of more formal forms of a language is seen as the language user ages. The influx of new terminologies and slang can also causes changes in the vocabulary of the young and growing.

2.3.6 Gender and Culture

Gender also influences the expressions, word choice, intonation, and tone in the language. Some cultures have language restrictions based on genders. Certain

vocabulary cannot be used to refer to certain genders, and certain genders cannot use certain vocabulary.

2.3.7 Social Influences

Every society is stratified in different classes and they are mainly measured through economic conditions. Age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, power, economy are a few influencing factors which are promoting divisions among groups. Peoples' inclination towards prestigious variety comes after their desire to be upper class like. People who possess good education, job opportunities and wealth obviously influence low economic people to use high standard language. This means that whatever golden standard of living society has accepted usually provides the language standard accepted. In this present day, social media also tends to be a major social influence in the way people use language.

2.3.8 Natural Processes in Usage

Rapid or casual speech naturally produces processes such as assimilation, dissimilation, syncope and apocope. Through repetition, particular cases may become conventionalized, and therefore produced even in slower or more careful speech. Word meanings change in a similar way, through conventionalization of processes like metaphor and metonymy.

2.4 Previous Studies

The study of language change in sound starts at around the 19th century since the technology of sound recording dates to that time period, sound changes before that time must be inferred from written texts (written texts were also analyzed in studies for language change in morphology and syntax). This source of evidence, however, is largely based on orthography and stands as somewhat indirect evidence of how language sounds have changed. The use of rhyme and rhythm gives further details to earlier phonetic and phonological patterns. Under this type of language change, a school of thought arose.

These linguists (the Neogrammarians) explained that a given sound change, simultaneously affects all the words that contain that phoneme. The degree of accuracy of this hypothesis is rather controversial but this hypothesis did begin the development of methodologies of comparative reconstruction and hypothesis of sound changes that may have taken place in the past. Attempts have been made to develop a general theory of sound change, notably by the French linguist André Martinet. But no such theory has yet won universal acceptance, and it is likely that the causes of sound change are multiple.

2.4.1 The comparative method

The comparative method in historical linguistics is concerned with the reconstruction of an earlier language or earlier state of a language on the basis of a comparison of related words and expressions in different languages or dialects derived from it. The comparative method was developed in the course of the 19th century for the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European and was subsequently applied to the study of other language families. It depends upon the principle of regular sound change- a principle that, as explained above, met with violent opposition when it was introduced into linguistics by the Neogrammarians in the 1870s but by the end of the century had become part of what might be fairly described as the orthodox approach to historical linguistics. Changes in the phonological systems of languages through time were accounted for in terms of sound laws.

The study of language change in sound can be traced to near the end of the 19th century, when a French scholar, Michel Bréal, set out to determine the laws that govern changes in the meaning of words. This was the task that dominated semantic research until the 1930s, when scholars began to turn their attention to the synchronic study of meaning. Many systems for the classification of changes of meaning have been proposed, and a variety of explanatory principles have been

suggested. So far no “laws” of semantic change comparable to the phonologists’ ‘sound laws’ have been discovered.

2.5 Concerns in Present Study

All living languages are continually undergoing change. Some commentators use derogatory labels such as "corruption" to suggest that language change constitutes degradation in the quality of a language, especially when the change originates from human error or is a prescriptively discouraged usage. Modern linguistics rejects this concept, since from a scientific point of view such innovations cannot be judged in terms of good or bad.

CHAPTER THREE

DATA PRESENTATION

3.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to present data to account for the presence of language change. Both synchronic and diachronic change will be shown and all linguistic elements will be considered. This study makes use of secondary data collection, which involves the consultation of relevant literature, videos and of course previous studies.

3.1 Data Presentation

The data will be presented in tabular form, to clearer display differences between language varieties.

3.1.1 Change in Synchronic Linguistics

Although synchronic change can cut across various language elements (such as phonology, morphology, syntax e.t.c), this data covers lexicon, phonetics, and morphology.

3.1.1.1 Sound change in Synchronic Linguistics

Table 1

Sounds before /u:/ (yod- dropping)

S/N	Words	British English	American English
1	Tuesday	/ˈtju:zdeɪ/	/ˈtu:zdeɪ/
2	Tuna	/ˈtju:nə/	/ˈtu:nə/
3	News	/nju:z/	/nu:z/
4	Duty	/ˈdju:ti/	/ˈdu:di/

Table 2

/ɑ:/ and /ɒ/

S/N	Words	British English	American English
1	Modern	/ˈmɒdən/	/ˈmɑ:dərn/
2	Bottle	/ˈbɒtl/	/ˈbɑ:dl/
3	Sorry	/ˈsɒri/	/ˈsɑ:ri/
4	Shopping	/ˈʃɒpɪŋ/	/ˈʃɑ:pɪŋ/
5	Borrow	/ˈbɒrəʊ/	/ˈbɑ:rəʊ/

Table 3

Realization of the /t/ sound

S/N	Words	British English	American English
1	Daughter	/ˈdɔ:tə/	/ˈdɑ:dər/
2	Meeting	/ˈmi:tɪŋ/	/ˈmi:dɪŋ/
3	Little	/ˈlɪtəl/	/ˈlɪdəl/
4	Interview	/ˈɪntəvju:/	/ˈɪnərvju:/

Table 4

Rhotic or non-rhotic /r/

S/N	Words	British English	American English
1	Car	/kɑ:/	/kɑ:r/
2	Hard	/hɑ:d/	/hɑ:rd/
3	Parking	/ˈpɑ:kɪŋ/	/ˈpɑ:rkɪŋ/
4	Shark	/ʃɑ:k/	/ʃɑ:rk/
5	Barnyard	/ˈbɑ:njɑ:d/	/ˈbɑ:rnjɑ:rd/

Table 5

/əʊ/ or /oʊ/

S/N	Words	British English	American English
1	Go	/gəʊ/	/goʊ/
2	No	/nəʊ/	/noʊ/
3	Overflow	/,əʊvə'fləʊ/	/,oʊvər'fləʊ/
4	Showing	/'ʃəʊɪŋ/	/'ʃoʊɪŋ/

Table 6

/ə/ or /ər/

S/N	Words	British English	American English
1	Better	/'betə/	/'bedər/
2	Water	/'wɔ:tə/	/'wɑ:dər/
3	Later	/'leɪtə/	/'leɪdər/
4	Seller	/'selə/	/'selər/
5	Percentage	/pə'sentɪdʒ/	/pər'sentɪdʒ/

Table 7

Stress movement, /ɪ/ or /aɪ/, /æ/ or /ə/

S/N	Words	British English	American English
1	Advertisement	/əd'vɜ:tɪsmənt/	/ædvɜ:'taɪzmənt/
2	Vitamin	/'vɪtəmin/	/'vaɪtəmin/
3	Garage	/'gærɑ:ʒ/	/gə'ra:ʒ/
4	Brochure	/'brəʊʃər/	/broʊ'ʃʊr/
5	Schedule	/'ʃedʒu:l/	/'skedʒu:l/
6	P(a)edophile	/'pi:dəfaɪl/	/'pedəʊfaɪl/

Since the language's underlying system is the same between the two forms of this language, pronunciation differences are more accurately referred to as alternation. Except in cases where phonemes change, or are removed completely from either language form, this is then sound change.

3.1.1.2 Morphological Changes in Synchronic Linguistics

S/N	British spelling	American spelling
1	Metre	Meter
2	Centre	Center
3	Earnt	Earned
4	Learnt	Learned
5	Honour	Honor
6	Aeroplane	Airplane
7	Dived	Dove
8	Analyse	Analyze
9	Organsation	Organization

3.1.1.3 Lexical Change in Synchronic Linguistics

The word list below shows lexical change in the English language from a synchronic point of view. This table will be showing data from British English and American English.

	British English	American English
1	Jumper	Sweater
2	Rubber	Eraser
3	Courgette (borrowed from French)	Zucchini (borrowed from Italian)
4	Aubergine	Eggplant
5	Coriander	Cilantro
6	Trousers	Pants
7	Bin	Trash Can
8	Rubbish	Trash
9	Motor way	Free way/ High way
10	Crisps	Chips
11	Chips	Fries / French fries
12	Biscuits	Cookies
13	Lorry	Tractor trailer
14	Fringe	Bangs
15	Sweets	Candy
16	Swimming costume	Swimsuit/ Bathing suit
17	Woods	Forest
18	Flat	Apartment
19	Supermarket	Grocery store

20	Duvet (borrowed from French)	Comforter
21	Petrol station	Gas station
22	Football	Soccer

3.1.1.4 Semantic Change in Synchronic Linguistics

Using words from the table above (lexical change), it can be observed that sometimes when a word takes different form in one variety (British English for example); it often has another meaning in the other variety (American English).

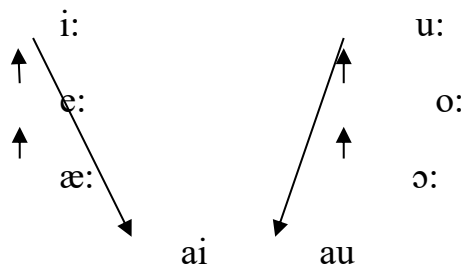
Word	British meaning	American meaning
Rubber	Something that is used to rub off something else, usually pencil writings.	Another word for condoms (slang).
Pants	An outer garment that covers the lower part of the body, separating each leg.	An undergarment that covers the genitals and the buttocks.
Biscuits	A small, flat baked good; usually sweet	A small, flaky bread; usually savoury
Football	An international sport played on foot, with the aim of getting the ball to the goal.	A sport played in North America with the aim of getting a ball to the opposing team's territory.

3.2 Change in Diachronic Linguistics

Diachronic change can affect several linguistics elements. Below I will consider these elements and their potential causes, and how these changes are seen in modern English.

3.2.1 Sound change in Diachronic Linguistics

The Great Vowel Shift: this was an unconditioned sound change that occurred between Middle and Early Modern English (around Shakespeare's time). At that time, there was a length distinction in the English vowels, and the Great Vowel Shift altered the position of all the long vowels, in a giant rotation.



The movement of the pronunciation of sounds

The nucleus of the two high vowels (front /i:/, and the back /u:/) started to drop, and the high position was retained only in the offglide. Eventually, the original /i:/ became /ai/ - so a "long i" vowel in Modern English is now pronounced /ai/ as in a word like 'bite': /bait/. Similarly, the "long u" found its nucleus dropping all the way to /au/: the earlier 'house' /hu:s/ became /haus/. All the other long vowels

rotated, the mid vowels /e:/ and /o:/ rising to fill the spots vacated by the former /i:/ and /u:/ respectively, and so on. That is why the modern pronouns 'he' and 'she' are written with /e/ (reflecting the old pronunciation) but pronounced as /i/. Due the Great Vowel Shift, the spelling of words remained the same but the pronunciation changed. The cause of The Great Vowel Shift is still unknown.

Lenition in the English Language

S/N	Words	Old English	Modern English
1	Modor /Mother	/'modor/	/'mʌðər/, /'mʌ ðə/
2	Faeder /Father	/'fæder/	/'faðər/, /'faðə/
3	Hider/ Hither	/'hider/	/'hɪðər/, /'hɪðə/

Palatalization in the English language

S/N	Words	Old English	Modern English
1	Ċēse /Cheese	/'tʃe:se /	/tʃi:z/
2	Caff /Chaff	/kaf/	/tʃɑ:f/, /tʃæf/
3	Ċēap / Cheap	/tʃæɑ:p/	/tʃi:p/
4	Ċild /Child	/tʃild/	/tʃaɪld/

Metathesis in the English language

S/N	Old English	Middle English	Modern English
1	Brid /brid/	Bird /bɜ:d/	Bird /bɜ:d/
2	Þȳrlīan /' θy:rlīan/	Thirl / θ ɜ:l/	Thrill / θrɪl/

3.2.2 Morphological change in Diachronic Linguistics

Removal of affixes

S/N	Middle English	Modern English
1	Amongst	Among
2	Amidst	Amid
3	Canst	Can
4	Dost	Do
5	Omnibus	Bus
6	Airplane/Aeroplane	Plane
7	Examination	Exam
8	Centum	Cent
9	Telephone	Phone
10	Whom(in its nominative form)	Who

Removal of non-affixes

S/N	Middle English	Modern English
1	Betwene/betwixt	Between
2	Promenade	Prom
3	Recapitulate	Recap
4	Olde	old
5	Gymnasium	Gym

Removal and replacement of non-affixes

S/N	Middle English	Modern English
1	erst	first
2	Thou	You
3	Hast	Have
4	wilt	will

3.2.3 Lexical change in Diachronic Linguistics

These are changes that affect lexicon or the vocabulary of a language. Some types and examples of lexical change are:

3.2.3.1 Formation of new words

This involves the creation of new words (whose concepts are new) from old words that combine to explain the new word. This is usually done by combining

borrowed words or middle English words. This means the meaning of the combined word is often a word for word or literal meaning. For example:

- Photograph = Photo (Greek origin) + graph (Greek origin)
- Television = télé (French origin) + vision (French origin)
- Laptop = lap (upper legs) + top(on top)- modeled after the format of 'desktop'
- Landlord = land (property) + lord (a formal title of nobility)
- Spaceship = space (the vacuum where planets are situated) + ship (a vessel for travel, especially on water)
- Laser = Light Amplification by the Stimulated Emission of Radiation (Acronym)
- Radar = Radio Detecting and Ranging (Acronym)
- Scuba = Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus (Acronym)
- Email = Electronic mail (contraction)
- Nerd (a relatively recent word first attested of in 1951)

3.2.3.1 Borrowing of words

This involves the adopting of words from another language into the lexicon of the English language without any change to the form of the language. The meanings of the word in both languages are usually the same. For example:

Guitar (Spanish)

Vanilla (Spanish)

Guerilla (Spanish)

Pizza (Italian)

Fascism (Italian)

Doppelganger (German)

Lager (German)

Angst (German)

Noodle (German)

Galaxy (Greek)

Democracy (Greek)

Acrobat (Greek)

Dinosaur (Greek)

Karaoke (Japanese)

Tycoon (Japanese)

Sudoku (Japanese)

Ketchup (Malay)

Caravan (Arabic)

Bungalow (Hindi)

Shampoo (Indian)

3.2.4 Semantic change in Diachronic Linguistics

Widening/Broadening

S/N	Word	Old English meaning	Modern English meaning
1	Mad	Used to refer to mental illness or insanity	Can also refer to extreme anger or excitement
2	Holiday	Used to refer holy days of religious feast	Can also refer to general work free days or trips away during free days
3	Bitch	Used to refer to a female dog	Can also refer to a disagreeable person especially a woman
4	Cock	Used to refer to a male bird especially a rooster	Can also refer to male genitalia
5	Mouse	Used to refer to a small rodent	Can also refer to a computer device

Narrowing

S/N	Words	Old English meaning	Modern English meaning
1	Hound	Used to refer to all breeds of dogs	Refer to a specific breed of dog
2	Queen	Used to refer to any female	Refers to a female monarch
3	Girl	Used to refer to a young child	Refers to a female child

Shift

This can refer to the reduction in the use of a term in one context, and an increment in the use of the term in another context. That is, there has been in shift in meaning.

S/N	Words	Old English meaning	Modern English meaning
1	Silly	Used to refer to a person who was lucky or innocent	Refers to a person who is foolish
2	Gay	Used to refer to a person who is merry and lively	Refers to someone who is homosexual
5	Nice	Used to refer to a person who is ignorant	Refers to someone who is pleasant or friendly

Figurative use

S/N	Words	Old English meaning	New English meaning
1	Bread	Literary refers to a baked good	Figuratively refers to food or sustenance

3.2.5 Syntactic change in Diachronic Linguistics

3.2.5.1 Word order

This affects the order of word classes in a sentence. Though Old English did not have a fixed word order, Modern English does.

S/N	Old English sentence	Modern English sentence
1	Dorothy always has loved the movies.	Dorothy has always loved the movies.
2	From where are you coming?	Where are you coming from?
3	We loved talking	We loved to talked

3.2.5.2 Reduction of inflections

Inflections are modifications made to root words in context of number, case, tenses, gender, and age. Old English employed the use of many of these modifications (on several word classes) but New English uses inflections for only number, tense and pronouns.

Nouns/Pronouns

Case

S/N	Case system	Old English	Middle English	Modern English
1	Nominative	þu	Thou	You
2	Accusative	þec/þe	Thee	You
3	Dative	þe	nil	nil
4	Genitive	þin	Thy/thine	Your

Number

The format for pluralisation of words in old English was irregular

Using the masculine word 'stone'

S/N	Case system	Singular (old English)	Plural (old English)
1	Nominative	Stan	Stanas
2	Accusative	Stanes	Stana
3	Dative	Stane	Stanum
4	Genitive	stan	Stanas

Using the masculine word ‘name’

S/N	Case system	Singular (old English)	Plural (old English)
1	Nominative	Nama	Naman
2	Accusative	Naman	Namena
3	Dative	Naman	Namum
4	Genitive	Naman	Naman

In modern English, however, the words above would have two forms; ‘name’ (singular) and ‘names’ (plural). Also, neither of these nouns is likely to be used in the nominative case.

Gender

Old English nouns employed the use of 3 genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter.

This could affect its inflection and the inflection of the verbs being used with it

Verbs

Auxiliary verbs

Subject	Old English (present tense)	Old English (past tense)	Modern English (present tense)	Modern English (past tense)
1 st person singular	eom wēse	eom wæs/wēsde	I am	I was
2 nd person singular	eart wēsest	eart wære/wēsdest	You are	You were
3 rd person singular	is wēseþ/wēst	is wæs/wēsde	He/she is	He /she was
1 st person plural	sind/ sindon wēsaþ	sind/sindon wæron/wēsdon	We are	We were
2 nd person plural	sind/sindon wēsaþ	sind/sindon wæron/wēsdon	You are	You were
3 rd person plural	sind/sindon wēsaþ	sind/sindon wæron/wēsdon	They are	They were

Regular verbs

Subject	Old English(present tense)	Old English (past tense)	Modern English(present tense)	Modern English (past tense)
1 st person singular	eom deme	eomdemde	I judge	I judged
2 nd person singular	eart demest	eart demdest	You judge	You judged
3 rd person singular	is demeþ	is demeþ	He/she judges	He/she judged
1 st person plural	sind/ sindon demaþ	sind/ sindon demaþ	We judge	We judged
2 nd person plural	sind/sindon demaþ	sind/sindon demaþ	You judge	You judged
3 rd person plural	sind/sindon demaþ	sind/sindon demaþ	They judge	They judged

The reduction in inflections and the fixed word order of modern English worked hand in hand. The many inflections, allowed for the word order to be changeable,

as the inflections showed the relationships between the nouns and each other, and the relationship between the nouns and other parts of speech.

3.2.5.3 Flexibility of function

This is the interchangeability of the use of words, from one word class to another.

This usually occurs between nouns and verbs.

S/N	Words	Noun- meaning	Verb-meaning
1	Bottle	A container made of glass, used to hold liquids	To seal in a bottle
2	Eye	An organ with which animals see	To look or stare at something
3	Email	A message sent an email system	To send an email
4	Name	A word used to denote anything	To give something a name
5	Pocket	A bag stitched to an item of clothing	To put something in a pocket
6	Picture	A representation of anything by drawing, painting, photography e.t.c	To represent in or with a picture

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, a well rounded explanation of the changes that occur in the English especially as it pertains to the data from the previous chapter.

4.1 Analysis of Synchronic Data

The data displayed in chapter 3 will be analysed. The language varieties considered were ‘British English’ and ‘American English’. Although these are umbrella names for regional varieties of the English language, the received pronunciations of these countries is what is being used.

4.1.1 Sound change

In table 1, when consonants are before the /u:/ sound, British English speakers add in the /j/ sound after the consonants. American English speakers do not add this sound. The removal of the /j/ sound is known as yod – dropping.

In table2, it is presented that British English speakers use the /ɒ/ sound when it is in between two consonants, while American English speakers use the /ɑ/ sound. This sound is often represented orthographically with the letter ‘o’.

In table 3, the articulation of the letter 't' in word medial position, differs. British English speakers articulate it as the /t/ sound, while American English speakers articulate it as /d/ or completely drop it.

In table 4, the articulation of the /r/ sound at the post- vocalic position is presented. When the letters 'ar' are presented British English speakers tend to drop the rhotic feature and opt to articulate as /ɑ:/, while American English speakers tend to pick up this rhotic feature and articulate it as /ɑ:r/. In table 6, when the English orthography 'er' is articulated, British English speakers use the /ə/ while American English speakers use the /ər/ sound

In table 5, the letter 'o' is articulated differently by certain speakers. British speakers using the /əʊ/ sound, and American English speakers using the /oo/sound.

In table 7, Stress differences between the same words in the British and American English are shown. The stress point of the British English word is often moved to the next syllable in the American English articulation. Differences in the articulation of the letter 'i' are also shown. British speakers use the /ɪ/ sound while the American English speakers use /aɪ/. In the realization of the letter 'a' British English speakers use /æ/ while American English speakers use /ə/.

4.1.2 Morphological change

In my morphological analysis, I observed that American English users, opt to spell as pronounce, which can be seen in the switching of –re to –er, -ise to -ize and –our to –or. American English users often opt for past tense regularization. This can be seen in their past tense of learn being ‘learn-ed’ as opposed to ‘learn-t’.

4.1.3 Lexical change

In my lexical analysis, I observed that majority of lexical differences occur in nouns. It is mostly in slang that other word classes are included in this change.

4.1.4 Semantic Change

I observed that, some British English words have somewhat different meanings in American English and vice versa. This could be due to the distance between these two regions leading to loss of uniformity of meaning. However, Semantic change is not overly prevalent in these varieties as they still share foundational similarities.

4.2 Analysis of Diachronic Data

4.2.1 Orthography

During my research I discovered that old English used the runic alphabet and later on began to use the Latin alphabet. Modern English is also based on the Latin alphabet, which originally had 20 letters. The Romans then added K, Y and Z to

help them transcribe Greek words, and the English later added W, J, V, resulting in the 26-letter alphabet we use today.

4.2.2 Sound change

Since old English is largely based on Germanic languages, there were numerous consonant clusters. However, modern English reduced the number of consonant clusters, making clusters of two or more consonant sounds reduce to singular sounds. This resulted in many 'silent' letters, e.g., knot, gnome.

Due to the widespread nature of the English language there was an emergence of rhotic and non-rhotic accents. The American accent is typically considered rhotic, whereas the British accent is considered non-rhotic.

During this research I came across the Great Vowel Shift. Which is one of the most well known evidence of sound change but it is not accounted for in terms of syntagmatic conditioning (there is no fixed sound environment for fixed sound behavior). For example the inconsistencies in “profane”: “profanity”; “divine”: “divinity”.

4.2.3 Morphological change

In my morphological analysis, I observed the shortening of words either to use the word in its root form (i.e removal of affixes) or to adapt to the current day's

orthography and lexicon. The removal of the –st suffix in many words for example ‘amidst’ to ‘amid’ and also the contraction of several words e.g ‘gymnasium’ to ‘gym’

4.2.4 Lexical change

Modern English contains vocabulary from three main backgrounds; Germanic (e.g., Old English, Dutch, and German), and Romance (e.g., Latin, French, and Italian) and Greek. It also contains a significant and increasing number of borrowed words from languages worldwide for example, ‘spaghetti’.

Word formation processes frequently involve the introduction of more compound nouns. Through processes like compounding, blending and back formation, words are like building blocks that can be mixed and matched till they have semantic relevance.

4.2.5 Syntactic change

In modern English, word classes are often interchangeable as a result of the loss of inflections. Words formerly distinguished as nouns or verbs by differences in their forms are now often used as both nouns and verbs.

Modern English is analytic (i.e., relatively uninflected). During the course of thousands of years, English words have been slowly simplified from the inflected variable forms found in Latin and German, toward invariable forms.

English has four forms, for example in the root word 'man', the forms are : man, man's, men, men's. In English, only nouns, pronouns (as in he, him, his), adjectives (inflection of degree as in big, bigger, biggest), and verbs are inflected. English is the only European language to employ uninflected adjectives; e.g., the small man, the big door.

In the English language today, we only change the verb ending on 3rd person singular (I love/ he loves). In Middle English, 2nd person singular also takes an ending (thou lovest). But in Old English you'd have ic lufige, þū lufast, hit lufaþ, hīe lufaþ where modern English would have I love, you love, he love, they love.

I also noticed an increase in the use phrasal verbs, e.g., pick up, put on, turn off. There is also increased use of modal verbs to e.g., could, can, might, may, would, will etc.

Using auxiliary (helping) verbs in interrogatives (questions) becomes compulsory, e.g. Is he home?

The word order is somewhat fixed for example, adjectives always precede a noun, e.g., A black bag and adverbs precede verbs e.g., he quickly ran.

4.2.6 Semantic Change

Semantic change is somewhat prevalent in the English language from a diachronic point of view. Often times seen in semantic shift or widening, but more often than not, these new meanings maintain the core idea of the words they once represented. For example the word 'car' was derived from the word the Latin word 'carra' which meant a four wheeled wagon.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

At this point a conclusion of the concepts discussed in previous chapters will be presented.

5.1 Findings and Summary

The English language has been analysed from both a Synchronic and Diachronic point of view. The upcoming segments will summarise the changes it has undergone.

5.1.1 Synchronic summary

When a language has a split of populations (due to migration, trade, shared boundaries e.t.c), language change results first in dialect divergence (the kinds of differences we see between British and American English). Over longer time periods, we see the emergence of separate languages.

5.1.2 Diachronic Summary

Old English is characterised by certain features such as;

- Its vocabulary being influenced by Latin and Germanic languages.

- It not having a fixed word order.
- Its nouns, pronouns, adjectives and verbs having many inflectional forms and endings.
- It having dative and instrumental cases.
- Its original use of a runic system, which was replaced by a version of the Latin alphabet in the later part.

Middle English is characterised by certain features, such as;

- Reduction of inflection.
- Simplification of grammatical gender.
Plural nouns and genitive singular.
- Standardisation of spelling
- Use of prepositional constructions
- Influence from Germanic (but specific fields were influenced by Old French).

Modern English is characterised by certain features such as;

- Most of the lexicon coming in from other languages.
- The change in the vowel system.
- The loss of most case markings in nouns.
- The possessive going from a case on a noun to a marker on a phrase.

- Word order in sentences being more fixed.
- Many verbs moving from strong conjugations (irregular verbs) to the weak (regular verbs).
- Increased use of lexical processes to make new word
- Increased use of phrasal verbs

This slow but steady change of the English language, means that Modern English users would not be able to understand Old English except it is learnt (just as one learns another language).

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