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Language Change: Progress or Decay

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ABSTRACT

Language change is a normal feature of living languages, but it is often discussed as if any departure from familiar forms represented a decline in linguistic standards. This paper examines the causes and consequences of language change and considers whether change is best understood as progress, decay, or adaptation. It uses a qualitative review of established work in historical linguistics, sociolinguistics, morphology, and language contact. The discussion distinguishes external influences, including migration, trade, education, media, and technological development, from internal processes such as sound change, analogy, grammaticalization, word formation, and semantic shift. It also considers how innovations spread through communities and why some forms acquire prestige while others are stigmatized. The review suggests that language change cannot be evaluated as progress or decay in general terms. A change may make a particular expression more convenient, extend the vocabulary available to speakers, or contribute to a new social identity; it may also create difficulties for communication across generations or require adjustments in formal education and publishing. These effects depend on context rather than on a general direction of linguistic development. The paper argues that descriptive analysis is necessary for understanding how languages work, while standard-language conventions remain useful in settings where shared written norms are required. Recognizing this distinction allows educators and language planners to respond to change without treating ordinary variation as evidence of linguistic deterioration.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is sometimes described as a system of rules that speakers learn and use to communicate. This description is useful, but it can give the impression that the system is stable and that its rules remain the same over time. In practice, no living language is entirely fixed. Pronunciation changes, words acquire new meanings, grammatical patterns become less common or develop new functions, and speakers introduce expressions that may eventually become part of ordinary usage. Such developments occur in all languages and are closely connected with the social lives of the people who use them. Crystal (2010) describes language as continually changing, while Aitchison (2001) treats change as an ordinary consequence of language transmission across generations.

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Despite its normality, language change is often regarded with suspicion. Speakers may complain that younger people no longer speak correctly, that borrowed words are damaging the language, or that digital communication is weakening grammar. These concerns are not new. Earlier generations have made similar complaints about pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical usage. A form that is unfamiliar to one generation may be ordinary to the next. The persistence of such criticism suggests that arguments about language change are rarely limited to linguistic structure. They are also connected with education, social class, identity, authority, and ideas about cultural continuity.

A distinction between descriptive and prescriptive approaches helps clarify the debate. Descriptive linguistics investigates the forms speakers use and the patterns that govern them. It asks how a pronunciation or construction functions, where it occurs, and how it spreads. Prescriptive approaches, by contrast, establish or defend conventions about how language should be used, particularly in formal writing and public communication. These approaches address different questions. A descriptive account may explain why a non-standard form is widespread without recommending it for an academic article. Likewise, a style guide may require a particular form for consistency without proving that other forms are linguistically defective (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021).

The distinction matters because the words progress and decay suggest that languages move along a single scale from inferior to superior or from strong to weak. Linguistic change does not normally follow such a direction. A language may lose one grammatical distinction while developing another means of expressing the same information. It may borrow extensively while retaining its grammatical structure. It may develop new vocabulary for technological practices while older words become less frequent. Whether a particular change is useful, confusing, prestigious, or undesirable depends on the circumstances in which it occurs and the purposes for which speakers use the language.

This paper addresses two questions: what are the major external and internal causes of language change, and should change be understood as linguistic progress, linguistic decay, or a process of adaptation? It reviews major forms of change at the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic levels. It also considers language contact, intergenerational transmission, social evaluation, and the effects of technological communication. The examples are drawn mainly from English because the literature provides many documented cases, although the processes discussed are not exclusive to English.

The paper is relevant to language teaching, dictionary development, translation, and language planning. Teachers regularly encounter differences between formal standards and the language students use outside the classroom. Lexicographers must decide how to record new words and changing meanings. Translators face expressions whose meanings or social associations do not have direct equivalents. Language planners must consider how to support a standard variety without unnecessarily marginalizing regional or social varieties. These tasks require an understanding of language change as a linguistic and social process

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper adopts a qualitative, desk-based review design. It does not report a new experiment, interview study, survey, or corpus analysis. Its evidence consists of published discussions of language change in historical linguistics, sociolinguistics, morphology, language acquisition, and language contact. A review approach is suitable for the questions addressed because the paper seeks to bring together established explanations and evaluate competing interpretations of change rather than measure the frequency of a particular feature in a defined speech community.

The sources were selected for their direct relevance to the topic and for their contribution to established areas of linguistic research. The reviewed works include general introductions to language and sociolinguistics, studies of historical and internal change, accounts of morphological processes, and research on language contact and grammaticalization. Works by Aitchison (2001), Campbell (2013), Labov (1994, 2001), McMahon (1994), Thomason (2001), and Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog (1968) provide theoretical and historical perspectives. Other sources address particular processes, including word formation, grammaticalization, and the social evaluation of linguistic forms.

The material was examined thematically. First, explanations of change were grouped into external and internal factors. External factors included language contact, migration, social networks, education, media, and technological developments. Internal factors included sound change, analogy, morphological restructuring, syntactic change, grammaticalization, and semantic shift. Second, examples were organized according to the linguistic level at which they occur. Third, descriptive and prescriptive interpretations were compared to assess the claim that language change necessarily represents progress or decline.

The review is selective rather than a systematic review in the strict methodological sense. The paper does not claim to have searched every relevant database, applied a formal screening protocol, or assessed the quality of all available studies using a standard appraisal instrument. Its conclusions should therefore be read as a synthesis of selected established literature, not as the result of an exhaustive review. No human participants or confidential personal data were involved, so the study did not require participant consent or ethical approval.

The principal limitation is the reliance on secondary sources. The paper does not provide original corpus evidence or field data, and its examples are weighted towards English. The processes described are relevant to the study of languages generally, but their operation and social meaning vary across language communities. A process that is common in one language may be restricted or absent in another. The review therefore identifies broad explanatory principles rather than claiming that every example applies equally to all languages.

RESULTS

Causes and Forms of Language Change

Intergenerational transmission and language acquisition

Language is passed from one generation to another through interaction. Children acquire the language available in their families and communities, but acquisition is not a mechanical

copying process. They identify patterns in the speech they hear and develop a working grammatical system from those patterns. Input differs across speakers and situations, and children may regularize patterns or assign a rule more widely than adults do. Trask (2010) discusses the role of acquisition in the development of linguistic systems, while Aitchison (2001) explains how small differences in transmission can contribute to longer-term change.

Regularization provides a familiar illustration. English has several irregular plural forms, including children, men, and feet. A learner who has recognized the productive pattern of adding -s may initially produce forms such as ‘childs’ or ‘foots’. Such forms are not necessarily evidence of a failure to learn; they reveal the learner's attempt to apply a pattern consistently. Most non-standard forms produced by children do not become permanent features of the language. However, where a variant is also used by adults or is supported by wider changes in the speech community, it may persist and spread.

Intergenerational transmission should not be treated as the only cause of change. Children learn from adults, peers, teachers, media, and other sources, and they participate in communities where forms already vary. The important point is that each generation reconstructs the language from actual usage. If the distribution of forms changes gradually, the language acquired by younger speakers may differ from the language used by older speakers. Over time, a difference that once appeared as variation can become an established feature.

Language contact, borrowing, and multilingualism

Languages come into contact whenever speakers communicate across linguistic boundaries. Trade, migration, education, conquest, intermarriage, religious activity, travel, and mass media all create opportunities for such contact. Thomason (2001) explains that contact can produce different degrees of influence, depending on the intensity and duration of interaction, the social relations between groups, and the circumstances in which speakers use their languages. Borrowing is often most visible in vocabulary, although contact may also affect pronunciation, grammatical patterns, and discourse practices.

English provides many examples of lexical borrowing. Sushi and karaoke entered English from Japanese; café and ballet came from French; and algebra has an Arabic origin. These words are associated with particular cultural, artistic, or intellectual domains, but their use is no longer limited to communication with speakers of the source languages. Once adopted, borrowed words may become integrated into the receiving language's pronunciation, spelling conventions, and grammatical patterns. Speakers may use them without being aware of their linguistic origins.

Borrowing often occurs because speakers need or want to refer to objects, practices, concepts, or institutions associated with another community. It may also occur when a borrowed expression is shorter, more familiar in a particular professional field, or associated with prestige. Scientific and technical vocabulary provides a clear example: international communication encourages the circulation of terms across languages, although languages may also develop local equivalents. The choice between a loanword and a native expression can therefore reflect practical, cultural, and political considerations.

The presence of borrowed words does not, by itself, indicate that a language is becoming weaker. Languages have always exchanged vocabulary, and borrowing can increase the range of expressions available to speakers. Mufwene (2001) places language development within a broader social ecology in which contact and speaker choices shape linguistic outcomes. At the same time, contact can be unequal. A dominant language may influence the vocabulary and public functions of a less powerful language, particularly in education, administration, and employment. In such circumstances, the issue is not simply whether borrowing is good or bad; it is also whether speakers retain opportunities to use and develop their languages across important areas of life.

Borrowing should also be distinguished from language replacement. A community may adopt many words from another language while continuing to use its own language as the principal means of communication. Language shift occurs when speakers increasingly use another language in domains previously served by their first language, potentially reducing transmission to children. The two processes can occur together, but they are not identical. Treating every loanword as evidence of language loss confuses ordinary lexical exchange with a much broader sociolinguistic process.

Migration, social networks, and prestige

Migration brings speakers with different linguistic backgrounds into contact and can change the composition of local speech communities. New residents may retain features from their place of origin, adopt local forms, or develop mixed patterns through regular interaction. These outcomes depend on factors such as the size of the migrant group, the frequency of contact, the age at which migration occurs, and the social opportunities available to speakers. Trade and urbanization can have similar effects by bringing people into sustained contact across regional and social boundaries.

Linguistic innovations do not spread evenly through a community. Social networks influence which forms speakers encounter and adopt. Labov (2001) demonstrates the importance of social factors in the distribution and spread of linguistic change. Speakers may adopt a feature because it is associated with a group they admire, because it helps them signal local belonging, or simply because it is common among the people with whom they interact. The social meaning of a feature can therefore affect its spread even when it does not offer an obvious communicative advantage.

Prestige is particularly relevant. Some varieties are associated with education, professional authority, or political power and are consequently treated as more appropriate in formal settings. Other varieties may be stigmatized despite having systematic grammatical and phonological patterns. Speakers often adjust their language according to audience and context. A person may use a local pronunciation with family members and a more standardized form in a formal presentation. Such shifts do not necessarily indicate that one variety is linguistically complete and the other defective. They reflect different social expectations and communicative settings.

Social evaluation can also slow or redirect change. A form may be widely used in informal conversation but avoided in formal writing because it is regarded as non-standard. Another

form may spread because it is associated with a prestigious group. Language change is therefore shaped by both patterns of interaction and beliefs about those patterns. A purely structural account may explain how a form is produced, but it may not explain why speakers favor it in one setting and avoid it in another.

Technology and changing communicative practices

Technological developments create new objects, activities, and forms of social interaction. New vocabulary is often needed to name them. Words such as internet, email, hashtag, and selfie became common as the practices they describe entered everyday life. Existing words may also acquire additional meanings. Friend, for example, can function as a verb in online contexts, while mail may refer to electronic as well as physical correspondence. Google is widely used as a verb for searching for information online. These examples show how speakers use familiar linguistic resources to describe new practices.

Digital communication has also changed the conditions in which people write. Text messages, online discussion, and social media often involve short turns, rapid exchanges, informal spelling, abbreviations, and the use of images or symbols alongside words. These features are associated with particular platforms and audiences. They should not be assumed to represent the whole language or to have replaced formal writing. The same speaker may use abbreviations in a private message and follow conventional spelling and punctuation in an academic paper.

Technology can make lexical innovation visible and accelerate its circulation. A new expression may spread rapidly through online networks, but visibility does not guarantee long-term acceptance. Some terms remain associated with a short-lived trend; others become established and appear in dictionaries and formal publications. Their survival depends on continued use, the usefulness of the expression, and whether speakers adopt it beyond the original online context. Digital media therefore provide conditions for rapid diffusion, but they do not remove the social processes through which language change takes place.

The influence of technology should not be reduced to a claim that digital communication damages grammar. Such a claim would require evidence about particular users, practices, and outcomes. Informal online writing may differ from edited academic prose because the purposes and conditions of communication differ. A short message is often designed for speed and immediate understanding, whereas an academic article is expected to meet conventions of precision, organization, and citation. The appropriate standard depends on the communicative task.

Sound change

Sound change concerns alterations in the pronunciation of linguistic forms. It is a central topic in historical linguistics because regular sound correspondences can help researchers establish relationships between languages and reconstruct earlier stages of a language. Campbell (2013) explains that sound changes may be conditioned by the phonetic environment in which a sound occurs or may affect a sound across a wider range of contexts. Some changes are gradual and difficult for speakers to notice, while others become socially recognizable because they distinguish one regional or social variety from another.

Assimilation occurs when a sound becomes more similar to a neighboring sound. This may make a sequence easier to pronounce, although ease of articulation should not be treated as a complete explanation for every sound change. Dissimilation is the opposite type of development: similar sounds become less alike. Metathesis involves a change in the order of sounds. The historical development of English horse from Old English hros is commonly cited as an example of metathesis. Such changes demonstrate that pronunciation is not fixed, even when spelling remains relatively stable.

The Great Vowel Shift is a major example in the history of English. During this period, the pronunciation of many long vowels changed, contributing to differences between Middle English and modern English pronunciation. The change helps explain why English spelling and pronunciation often do not correspond transparently. It also illustrates that sound change may affect a large part of a language's vocabulary without being planned by speakers. The outcome is a new pronunciation system that later generations learn as ordinary speech.

Sound change can have consequences beyond pronunciation. When two forms that were once distinct become similar, grammatical or lexical distinctions may be reduced. Conversely, sound change can create new differences between forms. Speakers may respond to these developments through analogy or other restructuring processes. Historical change therefore often involves several mechanisms rather than a single isolated alteration.

Morphological change and word formation

Morphology concerns the internal structure of words and the ways in which grammatical information is expressed. Languages create new words through processes such as derivation, compounding, conversion, borrowing, clipping, blending, and acronym formation. Haspelmath and Sims (2010) explain that these processes allow speakers to extend their vocabulary by combining existing forms or assigning them new functions. Morphological change can also involve the loss or reorganization of older inflections.

Compounding combines two or more elements to form a lexical item, as in website, which combines web and site. Clipping shortens a longer word, as in exam from examination. Acronyms and initialisms use the initial letters of longer expressions; NATO is pronounced as a word, while some other initial-letter forms are pronounced letter by letter. Conversion occurs when a word is used in a different grammatical category without an overt change in form. The use of email as a verb is one example of the flexibility of English word formation.

These processes are not merely responses to technology. They have long been part of language development and are found in different periods and domains. New words may arise in workplaces, schools, popular culture, science, and everyday conversation. Some remain restricted to a small group, while others spread more widely. A word's acceptance depends on repeated use and on whether speakers find it useful or appropriate. Dictionaries generally record established usage rather than create every new expression themselves.

Morphological change also affects grammatical patterns. English has lost many inflectional endings that were present in earlier stages, while word order and auxiliary verbs have become more important in expressing grammatical relationships. This does not mean that modern English has no grammar or that it is less capable of expressing meaning. Rather, grammatical

information is distributed differently across the system. A change in one part of grammar may be accompanied by increased reliance on another structure.

Syntactic change and grammaticalization

Syntax concerns how words and phrases are organised into sentences. Changes in syntax may involve word order, the use of auxiliary verbs, the distribution of grammatical markers, or the development of new constructions. English is commonly described as having a relatively fixed subject-verb-object order in ordinary declarative clauses. Earlier stages of English allowed a wider range of word-order patterns, partly because inflectional endings carried information about grammatical relations. As some inflections weakened or disappeared, word order became more important in identifying subjects and objects.

Grammaticalization is a process through which a lexical item or construction develops a more grammatical function. Hopper and Traugott (2003) describe grammaticalization as a gradual process involving changes in meaning, form, and distribution. An expression that originally has a relatively concrete lexical meaning may become a marker of tense, aspect, modality, or another grammatical category. The development of going to as a future-oriented construction in English illustrates this type of change. In a sentence such as “I am going to leave,” the construction can express a future intention rather than physical movement towards a location.

Grammaticalization is rarely an abrupt replacement. Different uses may coexist for a long period, and the newer grammatical function may develop in particular contexts before spreading more widely. Speakers may continue to use the original lexical meaning while also using the newer construction. This coexistence makes change difficult to identify through isolated examples. Researchers therefore examine patterns across contexts and over time rather than assuming that one occurrence proves that a grammatical change has been completed.

Syntactic change also illustrates why claims of simplification require care. A language may lose a distinction in one area while developing a more regular pattern elsewhere. A construction may become more fixed, but speakers may gain alternative ways to express emphasis, information structure, or time. It is therefore misleading to treat grammatical change as a simple movement from complex to simple or from precise to imprecise.

Semantic change

Semantic change occurs when the meaning of a word changes over time. A word may broaden so that it applies to a wider range of referents, narrow so that it applies to a more restricted category, or develop positive or negative associations. These changes can occur gradually through repeated use in particular contexts. Speakers may continue to recognize an older meaning even after a newer meaning has become dominant.

The history of the word meat provides an example of narrowing. It formerly referred more generally to food, whereas in contemporary English it usually refers to animal flesh used as food. Holiday, historically associated with a holy day, has broadened in ordinary use to refer to a period of rest or recreation, whether or not it has a religious connection. The word nice has undergone substantial semantic development and acquired its current positive associations after earlier meanings that included ideas of foolishness or ignorance. These examples show that meanings are shaped by usage and historical circumstances.

Semantic change can affect communication when speakers from different generations or communities attach different meanings to the same word. It can also create opportunities for expression. A word that develops a new technical or social meaning may allow speakers to discuss a new concept without creating an entirely new form. Dictionaries respond to such developments by recording senses, usage labels, and examples. Their task is descriptive, although editorial decisions about which meanings to include and how to label them remain important.

Language Change: Progress, Decay, or Adaptation?

The evidence reviewed in this paper does not support a general claim that language change is either progress or decay. The terms imply an overall direction and a shared standard by which all changes can be judged. Linguistic change, however, consists of many separate developments. A new word may make it easier to discuss a new object, while a change in pronunciation may make communication more difficult for people unfamiliar with a particular variety. A grammatical construction may become more regular in one respect and less transparent in another. These effects cannot be reduced to a single judgement about the language as a whole.

The idea of progress is sometimes associated with greater efficiency, expressiveness, or simplicity. A new word can certainly provide a convenient label for an emerging practice. A grammatical construction may become more regular, and a borrowed technical term may support communication among specialists. Yet such developments do not prove that the language has become objectively better. The new expression may be unfamiliar to some speakers, and a form that is efficient in one context may be unsuitable in another. Linguistic usefulness is closely tied to audience, purpose, and shared knowledge.

The idea of decay often emerges when speakers compare contemporary usage with a preferred earlier standard. Pronunciation differences, informal vocabulary, and grammatical innovations may be interpreted as evidence that speakers no longer respect the language. A familiar example in English debates concerns the expression “is comprised of.” Some prescriptive commentators prefer comprise to mean “include” or “consist of” and reject the passive construction. In actual usage, however, the expression is well established. The existence of disagreement does not mean that the construction lacks a pattern or that English as a whole is deteriorating. It means that speakers and editors may apply different conventions in different settings.

Prescriptive rules nevertheless have practical functions. Academic journals, government institutions, schools, and publishers need shared conventions so that readers can follow texts without unnecessary distraction. Consistent spelling, punctuation, terminology, and sentence structure can support clarity. A standard variety also allows communication across regional differences. The existence of such conventions is not itself a problem. The problem arises when a convention for a particular setting is treated as proof that other varieties are inherently inferior or that speakers who use them lack linguistic competence.

A descriptive approach does not require writers to abandon standards. It requires them to distinguish between describing language and deciding which form is appropriate for a

particular purpose. A teacher may explain that a form is common in conversation but not accepted in formal academic writing. This is more informative than simply labelling the form incorrect. Students learn both the conventions expected in formal contexts and the fact that ordinary speech varies systematically. Such teaching can improve their ability to choose forms according to audience and genre.

The concept of adaptation offers a more useful general account of language change. Languages change as speakers respond to new social conditions, new communicative practices, and patterns already present in their linguistic systems. Adaptation does not imply that every change is consciously planned or that every outcome is beneficial. It refers to the continuing adjustment of linguistic resources through use and transmission. Some innovations disappear; others become stable. Some changes expand expressive possibilities, while others redistribute distinctions or alter the social meanings attached to forms.

It is also important to separate language change from language endangerment. A language may change substantially while remaining widely used and transmitted to children. Conversely, a language may retain many traditional forms while losing speakers and public functions. Language vitality depends on social, political, educational, and economic conditions, not on whether its vocabulary or grammar remains unchanged. Efforts to support a language should therefore focus on its use, transmission, teaching, and presence in public life rather than attempting to prevent all change.

DISCUSSION

The review indicates that language change emerges from the interaction of linguistic structure and social life. Internal processes such as analogy, sound change, grammaticalization, and semantic shift provide mechanisms through which forms develop. External conditions such as migration, contact, education, prestige, and technology influence which innovations are introduced, adopted, or rejected. This relationship is consistent with the view that language cannot be understood independently of its speakers and the communities in which it is used (Labov, 2001; Mufwene, 2001).

One implication is that change should be studied as a process rather than inferred from isolated examples. A new expression used by one speaker is not necessarily a change in the language. Researchers need evidence that the form occurs repeatedly, that it is used by more than one individual, and that its distribution is changing across contexts or generations. Weinreich et al. (1968) drew attention to the importance of explaining both the linguistic constraints on variation and the social conditions under which variants spread. This perspective remains useful because it avoids treating variation as random noise or assuming that every innovation will become permanent.

The social distribution of variants also complicates the idea of a single correct form. Standard varieties have important institutional roles, but they are not the only systematic forms of a language. A regional pronunciation or grammatical pattern may be regular within the community that uses it, even if it is not accepted in formal writing. Speakers may move between varieties depending on setting and audience. The ability to use a standard variety is often a

practical educational and professional resource, but it should not be confused with the ability to speak a language at all.

The perception of decay is partly explained by the relationship between language and identity. People often associate the forms they learned at home or school with stability and correctness. When younger speakers use different expressions, older speakers may interpret the difference as a loss of standards. In some cases, there may be a genuine communication problem: a term may be unfamiliar to an audience, or an informal construction may be unsuitable for a formal document. In other cases, the criticism reflects social attitudes towards the speakers who use the form. Distinguishing these situations requires attention to context rather than a general rejection of innovation.

Technological communication makes these debates particularly visible because new expressions circulate quickly and informal writing is available for public inspection. Yet the existence of abbreviations or non-standard spelling in messages does not establish that users are unable to write formally. People routinely adapt their language to the time, medium, and audience available to them. Research on digital communication should therefore examine specific practices and compare them with the writing tasks users are expected to perform. Broad claims that technology is destroying language are not justified by the mere presence of informal forms.

The findings have practical implications for language education. Teachers need to explain standard forms and the contexts in which they are expected, but they should also help students understand variation. Correcting every regional or conversational form as though it were evidence of poor language ability can discourage participation and obscure the difference between a structural pattern and a formal convention. A more useful approach is to teach students how to recognize register, audience, genre, and purpose. This approach supports academic literacy while giving students a more accurate understanding of language use.

Dictionary development is another area affected by change. Lexicographers must decide when a new word or meaning is sufficiently established to be included, how to describe its usage, and whether it is informal, technical, regional, or offensive. Dictionaries cannot record every temporary expression, and inclusion does not necessarily mean that an expression is appropriate in every context. Their value lies partly in documenting how words are used and how their meanings develop. A dictionary that ignores established innovations would provide an incomplete account of the language.

For translation, changing meanings and borrowed terms create practical questions. A translator may need to decide whether to retain a loanword, use an established equivalent, or explain a culturally specific expression. The decision depends on the intended readership and the purpose of the text. A term that is familiar to specialists may be unclear to a general audience. Likewise, a word that has acquired a new meaning in digital communication may not have a direct equivalent in another language. Awareness of semantic and lexical change helps translators avoid literal choices that misrepresent the source text.

Language policy must balance the value of shared standards with the rights and practical needs of language communities. Standardization can support education, administration, publishing,

and communication across regions. However, policies that treat one variety as the only legitimate form may exclude speakers whose everyday language differs from the standard. In multilingual settings, policymakers also need to consider whether languages have opportunities to function in education, public services, science, and digital environments. Borrowing alone does not threaten a language, but reduced opportunities for use and intergenerational transmission may do so.

The review has limitations. It draws on selected secondary literature and uses English examples more extensively than examples from other languages. It does not measure current attitudes or the frequency of particular innovations, and it cannot establish how a specific change operates in a particular community. Future empirical work could examine language attitudes among different age groups, compare formal and informal writing in a defined corpus, or trace the adoption of selected loanwords in multilingual communities. Such studies would provide evidence about the pace, distribution, and social evaluation of change in particular settings

CONCLUSION

Language change is a normal feature of living languages. It occurs through intergenerational transmission, language contact, migration, social interaction, technological development, and internal linguistic processes. These processes affect pronunciation, word structure, sentence patterns, and meaning. They do not operate separately: a new expression may enter through contact, spread through social networks, acquire a new grammatical function, and eventually become part of the language learned by younger speakers.

The central question of whether language change represents progress or decay cannot be answered with a single judgement. Some changes meet new communicative needs or extend the vocabulary available to speakers. Others may create temporary misunderstandings or conflict with conventions required in formal contexts. Such consequences depend on the change, the speakers involved, and the setting in which language is used. They do not demonstrate that languages as a whole are moving towards improvement or decline.

A more accurate interpretation is that language change is a process of adaptation shaped by linguistic mechanisms and social conditions. This position does not dismiss the value of standard grammar, spelling, and academic conventions. It recognizes that standards serve particular communicative purposes and can be taught without treating all other varieties as defective. For educators, translators, lexicographers, and language planners, the task is to understand change and respond to it with attention to context, evidence, and the needs of language users.

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