Historical Linguistics

Language Change

What causes change in languages?
- In English, for example:
  - Old English from 449-1066
    - 449 Saxons invade Celtic Britain
    - 8th century *Beowulf*
    - 1066 Norman Conquest

English changes
- Middle English 1066-1500
  - 1387 *Canterbury Tales*
  - 1476 Caxton’s printing press
  - 1500 Great Vowel Shift
- Modern English
  - 1500 – 1700 Early Modern English
    - 1564 – Birth of Shakespeare
  - 1700 – Present Modern English

William Caxton (1422-1491)
- First English printing press in 1476
- Printed *Canterbury Tales*
- (Johannes Gutenberg’s first printing press was around 1455)
The Great Vowel Shift

- The Great Vowel Shift was a massive sound change affecting the long vowels of English during the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. Basically, the long vowels shifted upwards; that is, a vowel that used to be pronounced in one place in the mouth would be pronounced in a different place, higher up in the mouth. The Great Vowel Shift has had long-term implications for, among other things, orthography, the teaching of reading, and the understanding of any English-language text written before or during the Shift.

Thousands of words changed. Here are some examples of words affected by the shift.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Middle Eng</th>
<th>Modern Eng</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mice</td>
<td>miːs</td>
<td>majs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mouse</td>
<td>muːs</td>
<td>maws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>geese</td>
<td>ɡeːs</td>
<td>giːs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goose</td>
<td>goːs</td>
<td>guːs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>break</td>
<td>brəːken</td>
<td>brəːk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>broken</td>
<td>broʊken</td>
<td>broːken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>name</td>
<td>naːmæ</td>
<td>neːm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Early Middle English Vowel Shift
- Occurred earlier than the great vowel shift
- the vowels of the 2nd word in alternating morphemes were shortened; thus we have
  - please-pleasant
  - serene-serenity
  - crime-criminal
  - sign-signal
  - the later GVS only affected 1st word

GVS took 8 steps
- When we talk about the GVS, we usually talk about it happening in eight steps. It is very important to remember, however, that each step did not happen overnight.
- At any given time, people of different ages and from different regions would have different pronunciations of the same word.

Language changes
- at a fast rate compared to some aspects of culture.
- Language changes are evidenced in
  - phonology
  - morphology
  - syntax
  - semantics

Older, more conservative speakers would retain one pronunciation while younger, more advanced speakers were moving to a new one; some people would be able to pronounce the same word two or more different ways. The same thing happens today:
- the word "route" can rhyme with "boot" or with "out" and may switch from one pronunciation to another in the midst of a conversation.
phonological changes

- One clear example is the Great Vowel Shift
- other examples
  1. Loss of phonemes, e.g., /x/ as is [nïxt] is today night or [druxt] is today drought
  2. Addition of a phoneme [the z in leisure, azure]
  3. An allophone becomes a phoneme, e.g., /fr/, /sr/ were allophones in OE ( [ofer] becomes [over]

Morphological Change e.g., case endings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun Stem</th>
<th>Case Ending</th>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lup +</td>
<td>us</td>
<td>nominative</td>
<td>The wolf runs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lupi + i</td>
<td>genitive</td>
<td></td>
<td>A sheep in wolf’s clothing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lupo + o</td>
<td>dative</td>
<td></td>
<td>Give food to the wolf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lupu + um</td>
<td>accusative</td>
<td></td>
<td>I bought the wolf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lupe + e</td>
<td>vocative</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wolf, come here!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lexical Change

1. **Addition** of new words (e.g., sandwich, egghead, smog, NATO, flak, skybox)
2. **Borrowing** (OE had ox, cow, swine, calf, sheep, deer, but in ME we get beef, veal, pork, bacon, mutton, venison) at least 10,000 Norman-derived new words were added during ME.

Lexical change cont.

3. **Loss of words** (porridge, buckboard, surrey, locomotive, mammet [doll or puppet]
Semantic change
- **Broadening** ME *dogge* meant a specific breed; *holiday* meant holy day
- **Narrowing** (in 17th c. *meat* meant *food* and *flesh* meant *meat*; *deer* meant animal)
- **Meaning Shifts** (*silly* — OE happy to ME naive to ModE foolish; *lust* meant pleasure with no sex overtones)

Syntactic change
- OE used more, most at same time as –er and –est
e.g., *more gladder, more lower, moost royalest, moost, shamefullest*

Sociocultural Changes
- personal pronouns *he, him, it* are no longer being used much by American writers. For example, it was common to:
  - *It is the student’s responsibility to know the date for each test, so he should consult the course outline for those dates.*
  - Now, it might be more common to write:

| It is the student’s responsibility to know the date for each test, so he or she should consult the course outline … |
| or |
| It is the students’ responsibility to know the date for each test, so they should consult the course outline. |