

How Languages Change

Languages

The forces that change every living language, whatever anyone prefers.

The mechanisms, all attested across every documented language.

Sound change

Assimilation — sounds become more alike

Deletion — sounds are lost

Great Vowel Shift reshaped English vowels

Sound changes are highly regular

Grammatical change

Grammaticalisation — words become grammar

'going to' → 'gonna' as a future marker

Analogy — irregulars become regular

Case systems erode, word order rigidifies

Lexical change

Borrowing from contact

Coining for new things

Meaning drift

Obsolescence

Every feature now considered correct was once an innovation somebody objected to. Shakespeare's grammar would fail a modern