Internally and externally motivated language change*

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1 Introduction

The field of historical sociolinguistics has been well served in recent years. There are several volumes which deal with this topic, starting with the seminal study Romaine (1982) and culminating in the monograph by Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2003). There have been volumes such as Jahr (ed., 1998), special issues of journals like Conde-Silvestre and Hernández-Compoy (eds, 2005) and individual studies carrying the label ‘historical sociolinguistics’ in their titles, e.g. Bergs (2005). There is a network1 of scholars engaged in historical sociolinguistics and continuing work in the field is attested by forthcoming publications such as McColl-Millar (in press).

Given this range of research it would seem appropriate to consider just what changes in language fall within the orbit of historical sociolinguistics. It would appear to be a consensus opinion that all types of external change should be included here and by implication internal changes would be excluded. The relationship between these two sources of change has been pursued in a number of dedicated publications, e.g. Gerritsen and Stein (eds, 1992), Dorian (1993), Yang (2000), Pargman (2002), Jones and Esch (eds, 2002), Torgersen and Kerswill (2004). In overviews of historical linguistics the issue is generally examined, for example in Chapter 11 of Campbell (2004), ‘Explaining Linguistic Change’, there is a section entitled ‘Internal and External Causes’ (Campbell 2004: 316-326); in Croft (2001: 166-174) there is a section ‘Communities, societies and the internal/external distinction in language change’, to mention two well-known overviews of historical linguistics and language change of the past decade. Sources of change are also central to the comprehensive, three-volume work by Labov (1994-2010), especially in the first two volumes.

1.1 Approaching the internal – external division in language change

This chapter is exploratory in nature. It considers the issue of motivation for language change, specifically the question whether a clear distinction can be drawn between internally and externally motivated language change. The question is essentially one which considers the ‘behaviour of speakers’ versus the

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1 See the website at http://www.philhist.uni-augsburg.de/hison/.
‘properties of languages’ (J. Milroy 1992: 16) and it is obvious that the simple labels ‘internally-motivated’ and ‘externally-motivated’ language change do not do justice to the complex and intricate relationship between how speakers act linguistically in their community and the postulated abstract level of structure which is taken to provide the basis for speakers’ behaviour. It is clear then that linguistic reality is too complex to be captured entirely by a simple binary division of change types into ‘internal’ and ‘external’ (Dorian 1993: 131). Indeed, these two labels should not be understood as forming a mutually exclusive dichotomy\(^2\) but rather as referring to two possible sources which can be identified in language change, the description of whose differential interaction is an essential part of accounting for this change.

1.2 What is ‘internally-motivated change’?

Any change which can be traced to structural considerations in a language and which is independent of sociolinguistic factors can be classified as internally-motivated.\(^3\) A change which would appear to be triggered and guided by social considerations can be labelled ‘externally-motivated’. Obvious examples include both accommodation by speakers towards a social group with certain linguistic features as well as dissociation from other social groups whose speech is regarded as undesirable. Accommodation leads to the adoption of features already present in the group being accommodated towards, or to the development of intermediary features, while dissociation can result in the development of new features not already present in the speech of the group engaged in dissociation.

In this chapter individual examples of language change will be discussed for the purposes of illustration. Specifically, those instances where a mixture of motivations can be recognised will be examined in the hope of throwing light on the interrelationship of the two sources of change. There are inherent advantages to understanding different sources for languages change and what course this change can take. For instance, considering social motivation as a central factor can improve the understanding of apparently counterintuitive instances of change, or at least of those changes which would not be expected on purely language-internal, structural grounds. In addition, social factors can help to account for the reversal of change and for the important issue of non-change. As J. Milroy states: ‘In order to account for differential patterns of change at particular times and places, we need first to take account of those factors that tend to maintain language states and resist change’ (J. Milroy 1992: 10). This was stated more explicitly somewhat later by the same author: ‘... if we pose the more basic question of why some forms and varieties are maintained while others change, we cannot avoid reference to society.’ (J. Milroy 1993: 220).

\(^2\) I thus agree with the opinion of Thomason and Kaufman who reject the ‘untenable position that an external cause excludes an internal one’ (1988: 61).

\(^3\) In historical linguistics most attention has been given to internally motivated change. This has been challenged recently by prominent sociolinguists, some of whom have offered explanations for the concentration on internal change well into the twentieth century: ‘It has been quite usual to speak of historical descriptions as consisting of two types: internal and external, and of these it is the internal accounts that have been the most intellectually challenging and highly valued’ (Milroy 1993: 219).
Language change is not just about the rise of new features but about any type of alteration to the configuration of a language. Thus mergers (see section 3.4. below) are types of change and the more general processes of dialect levelling and new dialect formation (Hickey 2003a) represent equally valid instances of change although the amount of variation in a community is reduced in both these cases.

1.3 What is ‘externally-motivated change’?

Any variation and change in a language which can be connected with the community or society using this language can be labelled ‘externally-motivated’. Naturally such a broad definition covers a whole range of change types. In modern sociolinguistics, such change would be traced to speakers’ reactions to the speech of different social groups, see classical sociolinguistic investigations such as Labov (2006 [1966]) and Trudgill (1974).

External motivation for language change would seem to be most likely on the level of sounds. The reason is that speakers’ pronunciation is immediately available for assessment by others and hence differences in pronunciation can lead to change across speaker groups, i.e. via accommodation (Trudgill 1986: 1-38) or dissociation (Hickey 2000, forthcoming). The situation is not necessarily different in principle on the level of grammar. But given that the number of tokens which could theoretically trigger change across groups is smaller and that these do not appear in speech with the same degree of frequency and predictability as do phonetic features, the significance of grammatical features as triggers of change is less. Thus those scholars dealing with morphosyntactic change stress the role of token occurrence in establishing change: ‘Frequency determines which linguistic tokens and abstract types (structures) become automated and entrenched within the processing system’ (Fischer 2006: 325).

In historical sociolinguistics the social differences would not necessarily have been the same as at present and so much of the research in this field is about vernacular speech and the interaction of speakers often without the class differences obvious in modern western societies. Historical investigations in this vein tend to concentrate on private documents, frequently egodocuments (personal letters, diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, travelogues), to trace change across a given period, cf. the personal correspondence which provides the data basis for Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2003). This type of change would seem to have been community-internal, i.e. to have occurred within a speech community without any outside influence. However, there is also community-external change which originates from outside the speech community in question. Such change is due to language or dialect contact (on the latter see studies like Britain 1997).

1.3.1 The case of language contact

The influence of one language on another is not necessarily about primary social differences between speakers. For instance, language contact can lead to change which does not appear to have been determined by social factors as in the case of
Old English and Old Norse in the ninth and tenth centuries in Scotland and the north of England. There can of course be contact which is connected with social differences, e.g. that of French and English in England and of French and Irish in Ireland (Hickey 1997). Many loans into both English and Irish were imposed from above through the second language varieties of English and Irish spoken by the respective French communities in late medieval England and Ireland.

Language contact scenarios (Myers-Scotton 2002; Winford 2005; Matras 2009; Hickey, ed. 2010) are often regarded as leading to convergence between languages although some authors favour a single source for change rather than more than one (Lass and Wright 1986). Nonetheless, it is fruitful to consider instances of possible convergence to exercise the arguments for and against this scenario. A case in point is the development of non-initial stress in Southern Irish. Here long vowels developed in Middle Irish through the loss of consonants and compensatory lengthening, e.g. Old Irish sochaide /\textipa{sɔxɪə}\rightarrow socháí /\textipa{sɔːxi}/ ‘host, crowd; society’. These long vowels later attracted stress in the south — /\textipa{sɔːxi}/ → /\textipa{sɔxɪ}/ — but not in the north and west. However, the south is the area where the contact with the Anglo-Normans was greatest and Norman French had non-initial stress, cf. avantage > Irish buntáiste /\textipa{bʊntəːst}/ ‘advantage’ with a long second vowel stressed in the south. Instances of convergence in contact would thus seem to be both internally and externally motivated.4

1.4 Where does change begin?

Speakers are the agents of change. It goes without saying that speakers change language and that the term ‘language’ is an abstraction over the collective behaviour of a speech community. It is salutary to remember that when one is dealing with structural and developmental tendencies in language it is in the linguistic behaviour of speakers that these are manifested (J. Milroy 2003).

Change begins with variation in the speech of speakers, ultimately of individual speakers. But continuously occurring variation in speech only leads to established instances of change in some cases. And it is communities (or sub-communities) who carry it forward. So change must reach a certain threshold to become established. While it is not possible to predict change, accounting for change which has already occurred is a legitimate pursuit for linguists.

1.4.1 Awareness of change

Among speakers who are not linguistically alert there would seem to be no obvious awareness of different sources for language change. Indeed if anything, socially triggered change may evince greater awareness as speakers are liable to be conscious of the social forces involved. Additionally, one can point to

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4 Dorian (1993: 135) mentions that ‘....there is a natural tendency to assign convergent change to external motivation and divergent change to internal motivation’ though it is doubtful whether this simplistic division of types can be upheld in the face of data where divergent change is triggered by contact.
prescriptivism as one prominent cause for awareness of change. But prescriptivism tends to have a retarding influence on change rather than promoting it and does not have a dynamic quality, rather it is frequently characterised by attempting to reverse changes which are already well underway.

Various instances of grammaticalisation in the late modern period became the target of objections by prescriptive authors, e.g. the progressive passive, seen in *the house was being built* rather than *the house was building*, was remarked on negatively in the late eighteenth century when it was coming into use (Traugott 1972: 178). The same is true of other grammatical phenomena which gained the attention of prescriptivists, e.g. split infinitives (*to seriously consider the matter*), future continuous with *going* (*we’re going to be involved a lot in that process*), quantifier *lots of* (*there’s lots of talk about ecology these days*). Generally prescriptive comments stem from an awareness of the presence of these structures in colloquial speech and from the resulting attempt to exclude them from more formal registers of language.

Prescriptivism can also lead to a static situation where a change does not go to completion and where both the incoming and the outgoing forms/structures are possible in a language, cf. the censure of sentence final prepositions in English or the insistence of a specific form of oblique *who*, both seen in *The man with whom she was talking* versus *The man who she was talking with*.

Sociolinguistic censure, in the form of prescriptivism, may also stop a development entirely, or at least exclude it from standard forms of a language. A clear instance of this is *tun* ‘do’ as an auxiliary which was extensive in Early Modern High German (Langer 2001) and which is only found in vernaculars of present-day German, e.g. *Ich tue dir das Geld morgen bringen* lit. ‘I do-you-DATIVE the money tomorrow bring-INFINITIVE’ which would be: *Ich bringe dir das Geld morgen* lit. ‘I bring you-DATIVE the money tomorrow’ in standard German, without the use of an auxiliary ‘do’ *tun* (first person singular: *tue*).

1.4.2 Salience and markedness

Salient features are those speakers recognise as typical of a variety or language and which they may react positively or negatively to. Such features may be the result of natural phonetic processes (such as those discussed in 3.1 below). For instance, a velarised [h] is often mentioned by speakers of Castillian Spanish as being typical of Catalan and thus is a salient feature of the latter. Marked features, on the other hand, are those which are typologically unusual. For instance, the lowering of /u/ to /ʌ/ (see the discussion in 3.2 below) is cross-linguistically unusual and is not found in the major European languages although southern British English and varieties of English connected with it show the shift.

Negative and positive salience are frequently associated with stigma and prestige respectively. It should be pointed out, however that ‘prestige’ does not have to be associated with publicly recognised power groups in a society but can

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5 My thanks go to Elizabeth Traugott for pointing out these examples as relevant to the current discussion.
be located on a smaller scale and on a local level as shown by Eckert (2000)\(^6\) in her examination of adolescents and by James and Lesley Milroy in their investigations of working class social networks in Belfast.\(^7\)

### 2 Assessing the principles of change

If all variation had an equal chance of becoming established as an item of change then the results would be random without recognisable patterning. But this is obviously not the case. So there appear to be preferences for certain types of variation to establish themselves as change in a speech community. It is true that no type of change can in principle be excluded from occurring, as Andersen (1988) has shown in his discussion of several instances of ‘unlikely’ changes. However, there are cross-linguistically common changes. The question then is why certain kinds occur more frequently than others. Whatever the role of social factors in the actuation, propagation and termination of change it does not seem possible to correlate any of these factors with specific kinds of changes. For example, it would be untenable to maintain that lower-middle class hypercorrection always favours the production of non-postvocalic /r/. This may be the case in the United States, but it is not so in Britain, to quote two countries with obviously contrasting social assessments of non-postvocalic /r/.

If external factors are not responsible for the relative occurrence of change types, then the reasons must be sought among internal factors, i.e. these types must be causally connected to structural features of language (in phonology and morphosyntax) or to contingencies of language production (in phonetics).

It is obvious that there are regularities in language change. These have different causes on different levels of language. In phonetics the regularities are generally associated with speech production and perception which also interact with the structural properties of the sound system of a language.

Consider the fact that intervocalic consonants have a tendency to become voiced. Cross-linguistically, the rise of voiced intervocalic consonants is much more common than the reverse, so that a development like /afa/ > /ava/ is more likely than /ava/ > /afa/. Examples abound from the Romance languages and in early forms of English, Danish, Finnish, etc. The ‘internal’ motivation for this type of change lies in the tendency for voice, present on both sides of a segment, to spread to a consonant thus rendering it voiced. There is usually more resistance to this spread if the originally voiceless segment is also long, hence the lesser tendency for geminates to voice compared with simplex consonants, cf. Latin *peccatum* which became Irish *peaca* ‘sin’ (with the shift of a geminate to a simplex consonant retaining voicelessness) and Latin *sacerdos* which became Irish *sagart* ‘priest’ (with the voicing of the simplex /k/ of the Latin original).

Of course, additional factors may play a role here, e.g. if the voiced consonant is followed by a voiceless one then the latter can induce voicelessness.

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\(^6\) Eckert (2000: 226-228) offers a succinct critique of the undifferentiated use of the terms ‘stigma’ and ‘prestige’.

\(^7\) For general information on their investigations of social networks, see L. Milroy (1987) and for further information on prescriptivism and the relationship of vernaculars to standards, see Milroy and Milroy (1999).
with the preceding consonant. If the voiceless element then disappears the change might look like a straightforward case of devoicing. In Irish this change can be recognised with many words, e.g. fáightha [f̪ˠəːχə] ‘left’ which developed into [fˠəːχː] by the [h] devoicing the preceding [g] and then disappearing.

Another case of phonetic motivation is the greater tendency of low vowels rather than high ones to lengthen. In the Irish of Cois Fhairrge, west of Galway city (Hickey 2010), all low vowels are long, irrespective of their systemic status, but the corresponding high vowels show a distinction in phonetic length, e.g. fear /fˠəːr/ [fˠəːr] ‘man’ and tá /tˠːəː/ [tˠːəː] ‘is’ but duine /d̪ˠiːnə/ [d̪ˠiːnə] ‘person’ and min /m̪ˠiːnˠ/ [m̪ˠiːnˠ] ‘smooth’.

This tendency can, of course, interact with others to produce different results in different languages or stages of a language. Where vowel length is conditioned by phonetic environment long vowels may result as in late Old English where short high vowels before voiced clusters, typically /nd/, were lengthened yielding shifts like blind /bl̪ˠːnd/ > /blːnd/, mind /m̪ˠiːnd/ > /miːnd/ (producing hypercharacterised syllables, see Lass 1984: 250-260).

There may also be system considerations in operation. A language with a systemic length distinction for vowels may show lowering with lengthening. For example, in early Middle English vowels in open syllables were lowered and also lengthened, e.g. nosu /nɔː.zuː/ > nose /nɔː.zəː/ ‘nose’, stelan /ste.lan/ > stele /steː.lə/ ‘steal’ (on this Open Syllable Lengthening, see Minkova 1982).

Analogous regularities in change can be found on other levels of language. From semantic/pragmatic investigations it is known that over time structures are co-opted by speakers to increasingly express their own attitudes and beliefs (Lyons in Traugott 2003: 125). One of the best-known cases of this is the development of while from a purely temporal adverb in Old English, hwilum, to expressing speaker attitudes as in While I like linguistics, I think I’ll take literature for my orals. Another similar development is the shift from deontic to epistemic modality (Traugott 1989) with English modals like must, e.g. I must do this first (deontic) versus He must be home by now (epistemic – ‘it must be the case that he is home by now’) which is a common direction of change for modals (Fischer 2006: 261).

When the developments alluded to above were in their early stages they represented innovations but did not constitute change until they spread and became part of the system in the languages concerned. This transition from variation to system was captured neatly by Kiparsky in comments on developments in phonology: “[N]atural phonological processes, originating in production, perception, and acquisition, result in inherent, functionally controlled variability of speech. ‘Sound change’ takes place when the results of these processes are internalized by language learners as part of their grammatical competence.” (Kiparsky 1988: 389).

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8 The distinction in relative frontness and backness of the low vowels is not relevant to the point being made here.
9 Fischer regards this development as a genuine case of grammaticalisation as it involves a category – that of core modals – and not a single word such as while, Fischer 2006: 263).
2.1 Structural regularity and change

If there are changes which are triggered by strictly language-internal considerations then they must be ultimately traceable to properties of the system. Inasmuch as such changes appear in early childhood when speakers are establishing their internal language systems then they can be associated with structural regularity. Put in different terms, it is difficult to conceive of internally-motivated language change which in itself produces irregularity. However, what may very well be the case is that change on one level, e.g. certain types of phonetic change such as lenition in syllable rhymes or fortition in syllable onsets, can lead to detrimental change on higher levels, notably in morphology. For instance, there was lenition of intervocalic fricatives in Old English seen in word pairs like *wif* [wiːf] : *wifas* [wiːvas] (present-day *wife* [waɪf] : *wives* [waɪvz]). This development resulted in an alternation of voiceless and voiced fricatives between singular and plural in English which increased the degree of irregularity in English morphology and which in time became opaque in its motivation as the original rule no longer applied in later forms of English, e.g. *roof* [ruːf] : *rooves* [ruːvz] but *cuff* [kʌf] : *cuffs* [kʌfs]. This voicing of intervocalic fricatives is a prime example of internally-motivated language change. Nonetheless, it cannot be ruled out that the change spread by one group showing this change and others picking it up from this group. If this were the case then the change, viewed across the whole society of the time, would have been a mixture of internal and external motivation. In retrospect it is not possible to determine if this was indeed the case.

The type of change which is quintessentially associated with the promotion of structural regularity is undoubtedly analogical change (see Campbell 2004: 103-121, ‘Analogical Change’ for a detailed overview). Proportional analogy, e.g. the migration of suffixal verbs into a class of vowel-alternating verbs (‘strong’ verbs) on the basis of phonetic similarity in some non-standard varieties of English (vernacular English in the Lower South of the United States, for example), can be seen in shifts like *bring* : *brought* > *bring* : *brung* by analogy with *sing* : *sing*. Other instances would be *dive* : *dived* > *dive* : *dove* by analogy with verbs like *strive* : *strove*.

Analogy can also promote feature maintenance over time. Consider the dental fricatives of English which have a low functional load, i.e. minimal pairs like *teeth* : *teethe* are relatively rare. However, the distinction in voice for fricatives is central to the phonology of English as pairs like *cease* : *seize*, *sip* : *zip*; *vet* : *wet*, *life* : *live* (adj.) clearly show. A similar argument could be used for the maintenance of /θ/, /ð/ in Castillian Spanish, where the two fricatives match other sets of fricatives such as /s/, /z/ and /x/, /ʝ/ (on the development of fricatives in forms of Spanish, see Penny 2002: 96-110).

2.2 The actuation problem

This problem can best be formulated in the words of Weinreich, Labov and Herzog in their seminal study of social motivation for language change: ‘Why do changes in a structural feature take place in a particular language at a given time, but not in other languages with the same feature, or in the same language at other
times’ (Weinreich, Labov and Herzog 1968: 102). For externally-motivated change social reasons can be suggested, e.g. imitation of a group showing certain features or speakers distancing themselves from a group with other features. Why this social motivation should become active at the time it does might be explained by further factors in the society in question, e.g. rapid change in social structure and relative prosperity as was the case in Dublin during the early 1990s.

The actuation of change must be triggered by external factors. If change was purely internal and determined by preferred structural properties of language or developmental tendencies (to establish these properties) then it is difficult to account for why certain internally-motivated changes take place when they do and not at other times and in other languages. For instance, if increasing sonority for consonants in intervocalic position is a developmental tendency in language then why did this occur in Old English (see discussion above) but is not active in present-day English? This question could be repeated for a whole range of changes in some forms of English but not in others. For instance, why did the Scottish Vowel Length Rule only arise in Scotland or why did Canadian Raising only become fully established in Canada?

3 Evaluating instances of change

The following sections examine a further number of instances of change and assesses their possible motivation from the perspective of internal and external motivation. In this context a major question is whether one can exclusively assign the trigger for a change to either an internal or external cause. If a change can be associated with a general principle of language structure and/or development over longer periods of time, then internal motivation is at play, though not exclusively as the many examples show.

3.1 Phonetically natural processes

By the late Middle English period a number of words which had a short mid front vowel, /e/, appear with a corresponding high vowel, /i/, with adjustment of the spelling in most cases, e.g. enke> ink, streng > stringe, ūnken > think; Engelande > England (e = /u/). This nasal raising was probably triggered by the fact that the nasal cavity is open for nasals and that an anti-resonance occurs which interacts with that in the oral cavity. This anti-resonance sets in between 800 and 2000 Hz (Fry 1979: 118-119; Lieberman 1977: 177) and has the effect of depressing the first formant of the flanking vowel. Consider the following representative values for the first and second formants of five common vowels (Fry 1979: 79).

(1) **Typical formant values for vowels (in Hertz)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th></th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/i/</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>2100</td>
<td>/u/</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e/</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>/a/</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/a/</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>1750</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
So there is internal motivation here: nasals depress F1, causing raising of /e/ to /i/ which in turn results in homophony with word pairs like pen and pin. But of course this raising does not occur in every language so that its appearance in a language or variety implies this tendency was favoured at some time by the speech community in question. This happened in late Middle English and it occurred in the southern United States and in south-west Ireland as well. But its appearance, as an established feature, must have been triggered externally because the internal argument alone cannot explain why nasal raising did not occur elsewhere in the anglophone world.

3.2 Variation and the threshold for change

The lowering of Early Modern English /u/ In the south of England during the first half of the seventeenth century (Dobson 1968: II.585-590), the short high back vowel in the STRUT lexical set (Wells 1982: I.131-132) was lowered and continued to be so during the following centuries leading ultimately to [ʌ]. This movement would appear to be motivated by external factors. The initial lowering of the high back vowel /u/ would probably have been triggered by a preference for a slightly lowered realisation of the /u/-vowel which was within the normal range of target realisations for this high back vowel. With time the preference was enlarged and the lowered realisations were adopted by increasingly large sections of the southern English population. At some later point the phonetic distance to the original [u] realisation of the /u/-vowel was so great as to constitute a separate systemic unit in those varieties showing the shift, namely /ʌ/. The distinction was strengthened by the contrast of words like put [pʊt] and putt [pʌt]. This shift cannot be assigned an internal explanation, not even partially, because the lowering of /u/ is not known to be a general developmental tendency in vowel systems of the world’s languages.

The TRAP vowel in the past two centuries Variation in the target realisations of segments can become sociolinguistically significant if this variation is associated with a particular grouping in society. A case in point involves the vowel of the TRAP lexical set which at least from the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century showed a raised vowel in the region of /ɛ/ in southern varieties of British English. This was commented on by prescriptivists of the time, notably Thomas Sheridan and John Walker (Hickey 2009a) and was typical of early forms of what was later termed ‘Received Pronunciation’ (RP). But the raised TRAP vowel did not lead to a merger with the vowel of the DRESS lexical set so that the raising was in principle reversible.

For more conservative forms of RP in the early twentieth century, a raised vowel in the TRAP lexical set was typical (Bauer 1994: 120-121) but after the Second World War this older form of speech was increasingly out of tune with contemporary usage which was showing a lowered vowel in the region of /æ/. This tendency towards lowering and centralisation of the TRAP vowel has continued with values close to [a] not unusual in southern British English in the early twenty first century.
3.3 Urban British English

Urban forms of British English show a number of innovations in their local vernaculars. These are generally regarded as south-eastern features which have radiated out from the London area (the discussion about origin is not of relevance here, see Beal 2007 for further discussion). Three of the spreading features are the following.

*TH-fronting* This is a label for the shift of voiceless /\θ/, as in *think* [\θɪŋk], to a voiceless labio-dental fricative, i.e. [\θɪŋk] > [fɪŋk]. This shift can be considered to have an internal motivation as the shift leads to more audible friction and hence the /f/ has a perceptual advantage over /\θ/. It is attested in other varieties of English (in African American English as voiced /v/).

*T-glottalling* In intervocalic position the shift of /\t/ to /\r/ is a widespread feature, occurring not only in vernacular London English and other urban varieties influenced by this, but also in Scottish English and in local forms of Dublin English. T-glottalling leads to the loss of an oral gesture for /\t/ with glottalic closure the only remaining consonantal feature. Whether this can be regarded as a form of lenition is a matter of debate. In London English the shift of /\t/ is straight to /\r/. In Dublin English, by contrast, /\r/ is part of a lenition chain which starts at /\t/ and proceeds through /\r/ (an apico-alveolar fricative) to /h, r/, then to /\r/ and possibly zero (see section 4.1 below). Here the case for considering T-glottalling as an instance of lenition is more plausible. However, in both London English, Scottish English and Dublin English the shift can be regarded as stemming from an internal development in the sound system, this then spreading as the shift became a signal for vernacular metropolitan speech (at least in London and Dublin) and was thus emulated by other urban groups outside the capital (in the case of London).

*H-dropping* An endemic feature in urban varieties of English, which is of some vintage, is the loss of word-initial /h-/ as in *hand* [ænd, æn\r], *hit* [\r\t, \r\t] or *hall* [\xl, \x\rl]. This may well have been the result of less-than-target realisations of the glottal fricative with some speakers in the initial group which showed H-dropping. Given that the loss of /h-/ is phonetically gradual, i.e. that there are degrees of fricative reduction, it could be interpreted as a sociophonetic feature rather than a structure-driven development within the sound system. If there was a structural tendency in sound systems to lose /h-/ then the phenomenon would be much more widespread. However, in varieties of English it is a specifically British phenomenon. H-dropping is a highly salient feature, perhaps because of the amount of homophony it leads to (but see next section), and it was already the subject of negative sociolinguistic comment in the nineteenth century (Mugglestone 2003), something which blocked its establishment as a feature of both Australian and New Zealand English.
3.4 The special case of mergers

The sociolinguistic literature on mergers (Labov 1994: 293-417) is agreed that these are not the object of sociolinguistic comments. It would seem that speakers are generally not aware of the merging of sounds, even if this leads to some homophony. The motivation for mergers is not easy to determine. Among the many instances from the history of English and its present-day forms two will be mentioned here which illustrate somewhat different trends.

3.4.1 Merger of which and witch

At the beginning of the twenty-first century there are very few varieties of English which maintain a consistent distinction between the initial sounds in words like *which* and *witch*. The difference is between a voiceless labiovelar fricative [hw] (written *wh-*) and a voiced one [w] (written *w-*). In conservative forms of American English the distinction was known to have existed but it is highly recessive even in traditional forms of English in both the United States and Canada. In Ireland *which* and *witch* are now homophones for all young speakers of supraregional Irish English (Hickey 2003b) so that Scotland is the sole anglophone region in which this distinction is still maintained consistently by large numbers of speakers.

In all cases where homophony of *which* and *witch* has arisen the resulting single sound is voiced, i.e. [w]. This would imply that the change is motivated by the regulation of the relationship between vowels and glides, all of which are voiced in those varieties which have no voiceless [hw]. Because of the high sonority of vowels and glides, it is not surprising that the merger is to the voiced member of the pair, i.e. [w]. Furthermore, there was already a phonotactic restriction which applied to [hw]: it only occurred in absolute word-initial position whereas [w] was, and is, found in post-consonantal position, e.g. *twin* [twɪn].

3.4.2 Merger of morning and mourning

Among present-day varieties of English only a small number still have a distinction between the vowels in *morning* [ɔː] and *mourning* [ɔː], again vernacular forms of Irish and Scottish English. In all cases where the distinction is missing it is the higher vowel – [ɔː] – which is found.

An internal motivation for this merger can be given. Consider that in the early modern period (at different times for different varieties) the distinction between inherited [ɛː] and [eː] – as in *meat* and *meet* respectively – was lost with the two vowels merging to [ɛː] which was then raised to [iː]. The net effect of the merger was to remove a systemic unit /ɛː/ from the sound system of English. The merger of *morning* and *mourning* did the same, but among back vowels, so that varieties with the latter merger have a more symmetrical distribution of vowels across phonological space.
(2)  

*Four long vowel systems in the history of English*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Front</th>
<th>Back</th>
<th>Late Middle English outset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>i:</td>
<td>u:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>e:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>ε:</td>
<td>α:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>a:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Front</th>
<th>Back</th>
<th>System after meat → meet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>i:</td>
<td>u:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>e:</td>
<td>o:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>ε:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Front</th>
<th>Back</th>
<th>System after morning → mourning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>i:</td>
<td>u:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>e:</td>
<td>o:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>ε:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Front</th>
<th>Back</th>
<th>System with later diphthongisation and /a:/ retraction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>i:</td>
<td>u:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>e:</td>
<td>α:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>α:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The merger of both Middle English /ε/, ε:/ and /o:, α:/ did produce several cases of homophony so that an argument based on the avoidance of homophony would not account for the developments considered here (Milroy 1992: 14-15). Equally, the retention of distinct pronunciations in some vernacular varieties can hardly be motivated by this argument either because, if it was, then one would have to offer reasons in principle why one set of varieties maintained the distinctions while others did not.

3.5 Constructing systemic knowledge and reanalysis

For the present section quiet different changes are to be considered. These are instances of reanalysis, a phenomenon typically located in first language acquisition when children (Louden 2003) are constructing systemic knowledge for the language which they are becoming native speakers of.

*The Celtic mutations* In the pre-written period of the Celtic languages a series of sandhi changes at the beginnings of words led to regular phonetic alterations which correlated with grammatical categories such as gender with nouns and tense with verbs (Hickey 1995, 2003c). For instance, feminine nouns showed a shift to

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11 Consider in this context, the merger of up to five vowels to one /i:/ is a well-known characteristic of Modern Greek (Milroy 1992: 37).
fricative when preceded by the definite article but masculine nouns did not. Modern Irish examples can be used to illustrate this principle: *an chéin* /xə:n/ (< *cain* /kə:n/, fem.) ‘the tax’ but *an cabhlach* /kaulɔx/ (< *cabhlach*, masc.) ‘the navy’; an example from the verbal area would be *glanaim* /glanə:m/ ‘I clean’ but *ghlan mè* /glander/ ‘I cleaned’. At the time these changes were arising, the inherited inflections of Indo-European were waning so that at some stage across all the Celtic regions language learners began to interpret the initial alterations as indicators of key grammatical categories and not the inherited suffixes, i.e. they reanalysed the grammatical system of Irish and with that the initial mutations became part of the system of Irish and, due to parallel developments, of the other Celtic languages as well.

*Change in word-class in present-day English* Reanalysis can occur in adult speech as well and there are some examples from present-day English. A well-known instance is the word *fun* which has migrated to the class of adjectives in recent years (Aarts et al. eds, 2004). The trajectory for this change may have begun with equative sentences where *fun* was used as part of the second noun phrase. But where the latter consisted of the bare noun *fun*, it was open to interpretation as a predicative adjective as in *The party was loud.*

(3) a. The party was great fun. (equative sentence)  
NP1 = NP2  
(Noun) (Adj. + Noun)  
b. The party was fun.  
Noun1 = Noun2 Or: Noun + Verb + Adjective?

An interpretation as adjective is clear when *fun* began to appear in attributive position as well:

(4) a. The fun party we went to.  
b. Partying is a fun thing to do.

The clinching evidence for *fun* as adjective is its use in comparative and superlative forms, e.g. *A funner type of mobile, The funnest thing I’ve ever heard.*

This change would seem to be entirely internal: there does not appear to be any external social motivation for *fun* to migrate to a new word class. However, once it had done this, and especially when it appeared in the comparative and superlative, censorious comments arose, condemning the newly established usage.

## 4 The interaction of internal and external factors

### 4.1 Lenition in Dublin English

In positions of high sonority – intervocally and post-vocally before a pause – alveolar stops are lenited in all forms of southern Irish English (Hickey 2009b). Lenition can be seen as a scale with the full plosive /t/ at one end and zero at the
other with identifiable stages in between. The entire lenition cline is found in vernacular Dublin English as follows ([t] = apico-alveolar fricative).

(5) Vernacular Dublin English
\[ t \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{button} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{but} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{water} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{what} \]

For non-local, more standard varieties of Irish English lenition is only attested for the first stage, that is to a fricative, with one or two lexicalised cases where [h] is found, e.g. with the word for Saturday which has internal [h] in Irish.

(6) Supraregional southern Irish English
\[ t \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{button} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{but} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{Saturday} \quad [\text{sæhde}, \text{Irish Sahairn}] \]

Why was the path of lenition not continued in supraregional southern Irish English? The answer would seem to lie in the maintenance of phonetic distance from local, vernacular Dublin English. Supraregional Irish English arose out of middle-class Dublin English usage during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Hickey 2005) so that early supraregional speakers would have been aware of vernacular Dublin English and would have been motivated to avoid phonetic merging with it in the area of lenition, for instance by not tolerating glottalisation as an advanced stage of t-lenition as in (5) above. This development shows that the natural (internal) phonetic process of lenition was halted for external social reasons.

4.2. Vowels before /r/ in Dublin English

During the 1980s a new pronunciation of southern Dublin English developed in which central vowels were retracted and low back vowels raised. This accent came to be known as the ‘Dublin 4’ accent (later just ‘D4’) after a prosperous suburb of south Dublin where the accent was supposedly common. Shortly afterwards, the name of the suburban railway known as the Dart (an acronym deriving from Dublin Area Rapid Transport), a commuter train mainly in the southern parts of the city, came to be used for the supposed accent of the people who lived in the southside suburbs. The label Dartspeak was coined and found favour among Dubliners. This label was then given a particular pronunciation with a retracted and rounded vowel, i.e. [dɔːtspɪːk], and came to be written Dortspeak (and was much commented on by journalists, broadcasters and writers).

The retraction and raising of vowels was unconditional in this change and was found with common nouns with a vowel plus /r/, e.g. smart [smɔːr] ~ [smɔːr]. But if one considers advanced varieties of Dublin English today (2011) then one finds a central, if not to say fronted vowel before /r/, i.e. [smæːr] ~ [smæːr].
Retraction and fronting of vowels before /r/

Early ‘Dublin 4’ accent (1980s)
initial retraction and raising before /r/: *smart* [smɔːrt] ~ [smaːrt]

Later new Dublin English accent (late 1990s, 2000s)
no raising but fronting before /r/: *smart* [smaːrt] ~ [smæːrt]

What is remarkable here is that the remainder of the vowel shift in Dublin continued along its trajectory (general raising along a back path) and became established as the new supraregional form of Irish English for virtually all speakers born after 1980, e.g. *born* [bɔːrn] > [bɔːrn] > [bɔːrn], *point* [pɔɪnt] > [pɔɪnt] > [pɔɪnt].

The question why the retraction and raising of /ar/ was discontinued in new Dublin English of the 1990s can be answered by considering external factors. As the 1990s proceeded and Ireland entered a period of unprecedented economic prosperity, ‘Dortspeak’ became less and less ‘trendy’ and began to date. Salient features of this pronunciation, such as the retracted /a/ vowel before /r/, were no longer ‘cool’ and young speakers began to avoid them (Hickey 2003d). The pronunciation of *Dartspeak* as [dɔːtspiːk], i.e. *Dortspeak*, is now regarded as ‘stuffy’ and ‘uncool’ and the present pronunciation of *Dartspeak* is [daːtspiːk] ~ [daːtspiːk] with a central to front vowel before the /t/ in the first syllable.

5 Summary

It is a commonplace to state that language use is characterised by continual variation. Virtually all of this is entirely otiose. But occasionally some items of variation become established by spreading from single speakers or small groups to larger sections of a community. When this happens, the variation then becomes sociolinguistically significant. Speakers are unconsciously aware of any social value superimposed on variation by its being indicative of a certain subgroup or subgroups in their speech community.

If items of variation, e.g. phonetic segments, show differing degrees of distance from outset values, then speakers appreciate the relative distance to the originals: some items of variation will be closer to the outset and others somewhat further away. This fact allows speakers to grasp the trajectory of a change, which is generally only visible to analysts viewing it retrospectively.

By and large the variation in a language which can become sociolinguistically significant and lead to change across a community is regular, but this does not necessarily hold for every individual case, indeed closely-knit communities and networks can carry irregular changes forward if these accrue identificational value in the community/network in question.

While the variation in a language is largely regular it cannot be predicted for every individual instance. In the pool of variation in a language at any one time there will be some which is irregular, seen in the context of the language system at the time. For instance, ejective plosives would be highly irregular with
respect to the sound system of present-day English and are unlikely to establish themselves, but they did so in historical stages of Caucasian languages, for example.

The non-occurrence of change is as important as its occurrence. If there are certainly regular tendencies in language, e.g. in syllable structure and in the realisation of phonetic segments, then the lack of change in the direction of these tendencies in a community is significant as well. For instance, the maintenance of complex grammatical inflections in German, compared to the remaining Germanic languages, is not the result of random behaviour by speakers of the language, but by the role of these inflections in the identity of the German language.12

During a period of change sociolinguistic factors can be at play and effect the patterning which the change results in. In the case of the Dublin Vowel Shift, discussed above, the stigma attached to the retraction of /a/ before /r/ led to the removal of just this instance from the general retraction low back vowels (section 4.2 above).

Patterning in multi-item change implies regularity but the latter does not have to be total by any means. Speakers can handle a considerable amount of irregularity and lexicalisation, as was seen with the lexicalised realisations of /t/ as [h] in supraregional varieties of Irish English (section 4.1 above).

6 Conclusion

Viewed from the standpoint of speakers, change can in principle take place (i) during early childhood when language learners construct systemic knowledge of the language they are exposed to or (ii) it can take place after this phase of their lives when they begin to participate in groupings of the society they are entering and later on when they have become integrated into this society as adults.

Change from the first phase is generally reanalysis, as shown with the Celtic mutations discussed above, and is independent of social factors as early language learners do not interact linguistically with social groupings at this stage of their lives. Given that reanalysis is a change in the language system of a generation compared with preceding generations it is not a type of change which occurs widely in adulthood after speakers have established their linguistic systems, though there are individual examples, cf. section 3.5 above.

There is no overall name for the types of change which can take place after language learners have passed their childhood. Different factors are at play during different phases of life, language behaviour during adolescence (Eckert 2000) is not the same as that during speakers’ adult lives. Changes which may enter the speech of middle-aged speakers are generally lexical, possibly grammatical and rarely phonetic, compared to the changes young adults engage in while they are establishing themselves professionally. But all these kinds of change take place with speakers who act within a community embedded in a society.

Finally, one can consider whether the distinction between internally and externally motivated change is valid as a binary dichotomy. The answer is both

12 In this particular instance, processes of standardisation, which favour the retention of inflections, played a role.
‘yes’ and ‘no’. For early childhood, change is internal and system-driven and definitely free of external motivation. However, for adolescence and later life, change is both internal and external: social factors determine whether variation, inherent in all languages, is carried over a threshold after which it becomes change in the community in question. The actuation, propagation and conclusion of change is determined by social factors, but the linguistic course of a change is connected with structural properties and developmental preferences which exist across languages and which ultimately have to do with language production and processing. Again social considerations may be at work here and promote irregularity and disturb symmetry and patterning especially if there is strong social motivation for this disturbance arising and being maintained. Lastly, it should be emphasised that change should be seen in the context of non-change, i.e. what is altered and what is maintained in a language are of equal significance and depend ultimately on how speakers react to inherent variation in their speech community.

References


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