

Introduction to English Linguistics

5: Language Change

Prescriptive Grammar vs Descriptive Grammar

Prescriptive Grammar

The rules of language as authorities believe they ought to be used, regardless of actual use.

Descriptive Grammar

The rules of language as inferred from actual language use.

Language Politics



Figure: *Arrêt* sign, Montreal (CC-BY-SA [Tony Webster](#))

Traditional English-Language Prescriptivism

- ▶ “Do not end a sentence with a preposition.”
 - ▶ *Big cities are easy to get lost in.*
 - ▶ Cf. German *am Fluss entlang*, *dem Kiosk gegenüber*, *wir warten darauf*
- ▶ “Do not split an infinitive.”
 - ▶ *To boldly go*

Sometimes, Language Matters



Vsauce 
@tweetsauce

Follow



This is ridiculous: "www" contains THREE TIMES more syllables than the phrase it is 'short' for, "world wide web."

12:45 AM - 13 Feb 2014

Figure: twitter.com/tweetsauce/status/433748704940785664

Two Axes of Variation

Synchronic Variation

Variation between concurrent dialects.

Diachronic Variation

Variation over time.

Mechanisms of Change

Principle of Least Effort

The tendency for languages to move towards reduced energy drain.

Mechanisms of Change

Assimilation

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Prior sounds adapting to later ones (anticipatory assimilation).

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- ▶ *use to* [ju:stu] vs *use* [ju:z]
- ▶ *impress* (Latin *in* + *primere* > *imprimere*)
- ▶ *assimilation* (Latin *ad* + *simulātiō* > *assimulātiō*)

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Progressive Assimilation (not as widespread)

Later sounds adapting to prior ones (lag assimilation).

- ▶ *it's* [ɪts] vs *she's* [ʃi:z]

Mechanisms of Change

Elision

The omission of one or more sounds from a word or utterance (to ease pronunciation).

Clipping

Elision at the start or end of a word.

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Haplology

Elision of a syllable adjacent to a similar-sounding syllable.

- ▶ /'laibɪl/ for /'laibɪl̩erɪdʒɪn/

Mechanisms of Change

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The addition of sounds to a word or utterance (to ease pronunciation).

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Intrusive *r*

- ▶ /aɪ'sɔ:ɹɪt/
- ▶ after /ə ɪə ə: ɔ:/ where the following word starts with a vowel

Mechanisms of Change

Metathesis

The reversal of two adjacent sounds.

- ▶ /'aɪə̯ɪn/ (in rhotic dialects)
- ▶ *wasp* < OE *wæps*

Mechanisms of Change

Analogy

The extension of an observed regularity to new contexts.

- ▶ *faran, fōr, faren > fare, fared, fared*
- ▶ *hēawan, hēow, hēawen > hew, hewed, hewn/hewed*

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Idioglossia

An idiolect that differs greatly from its language context (e.g. secret language).

Isogloss



Figure: *dat-das*-isogloss (CC-BY-SA WMC user)

Isogloss

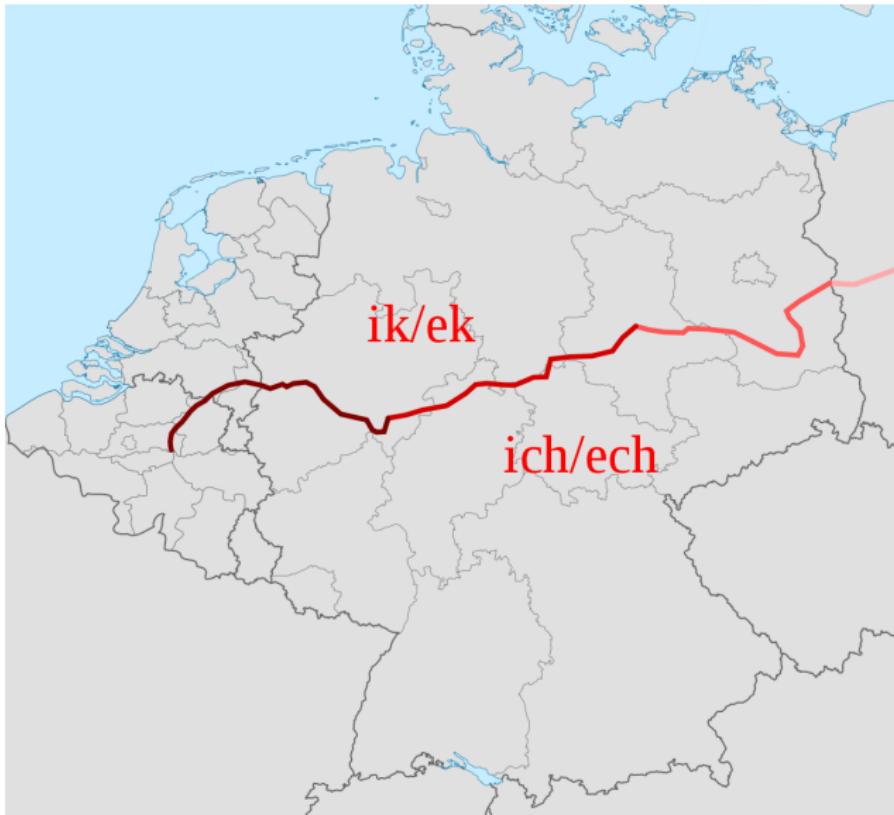


Figure: *ik-ich*-isogloss (CC-BY-SA WMC user)

Multilingualism

Code-Switching

Using different languages or dialects for different aspects of life.

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Diglossia

A multilingual community in which a language of lesser prestige is spoken at home and in informal settings while a more prestigious language is used in schools and business.

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Pidgin

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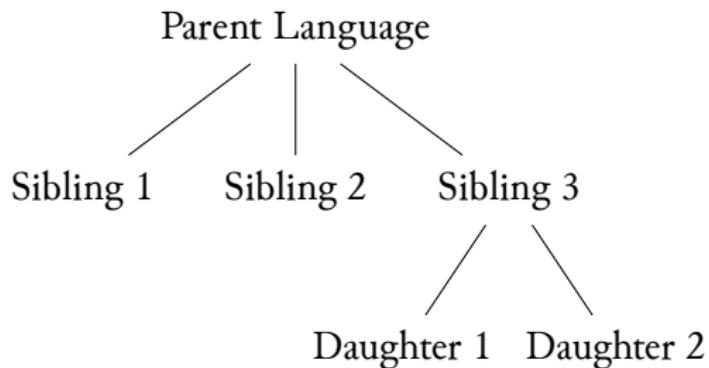
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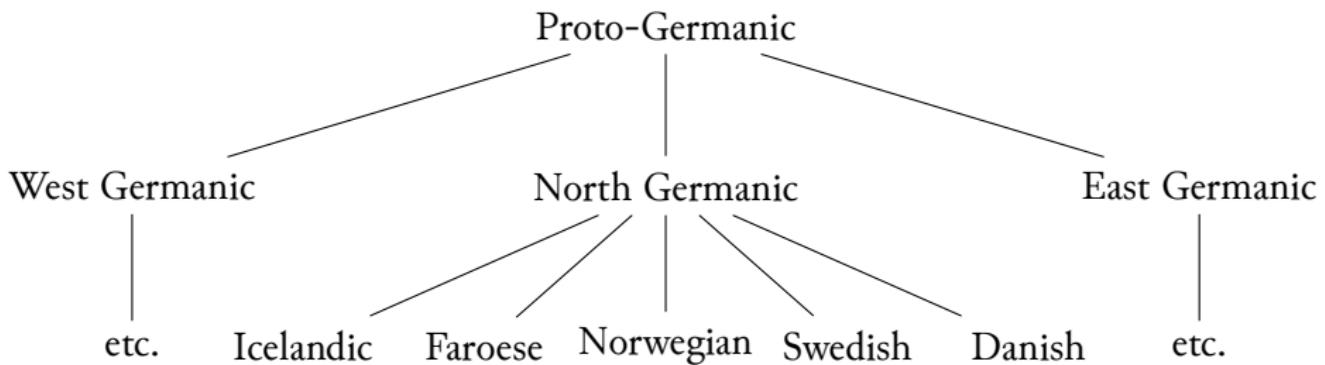
Decreolization

The move to abandon a creole in favour of a socially favoured language or dialect.

Language Families? The Tree Model



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Dialect Continua? The Wave Model

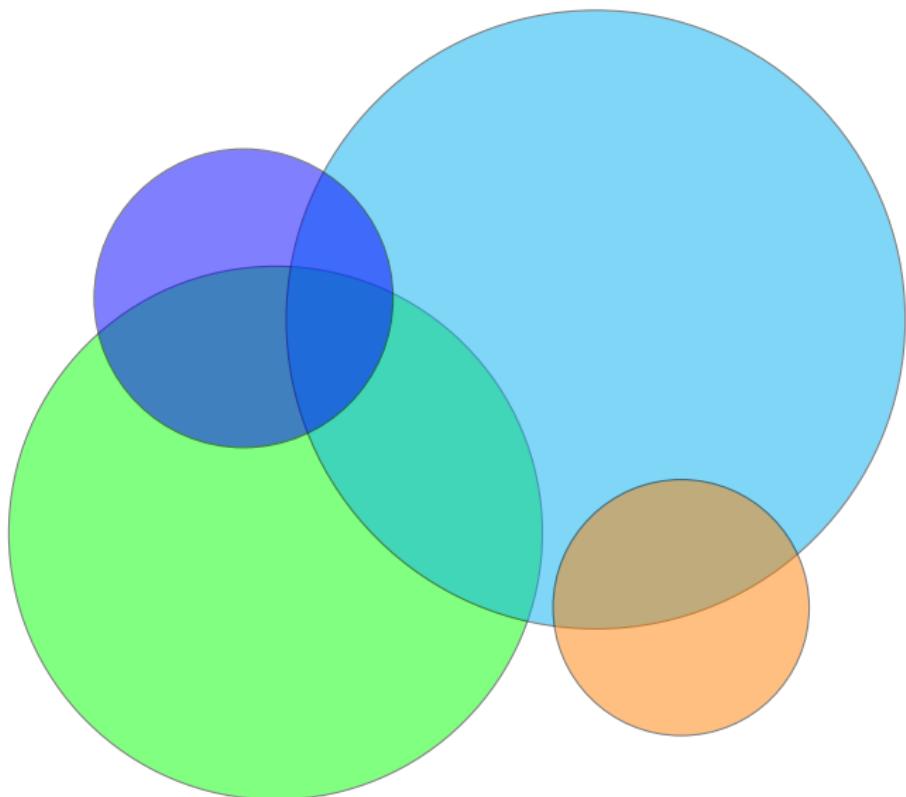


Figure: Each circle is a feature or group of features, more pervasive at the centre than in the periphery; the background represents a dialect continuum.



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