LINGUISTICS 407 **Lecture #9**

SOUND CHANGE

Sound change is an alteration in the phonetic shape of a sound as a result of a phonological process.

ME	**NE**
set	*set*
wīf	*wife*
hūs	*house*

The NE forms are replacements of ME.

> Modifications that lead to the introduction of new phonemes in a language, to loss or realignments of old elements, are referred to as **sound changes**.
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>
> events that result in disruption of the phonological system
> (p. 183)

If a phonological process is introduced into a language where it did not formerly occur, it may result in sound change.

Example: The OE velar stop [k] was palatalized to [t͡ʃ] before [i].

cidan [kidan] > *chide*

NOTE:
The introduction of a phonological process into a language cannot alone be considered sound change!!!

Example: interesting [-təɹ-] or [-tɹ-]

We cannot assume that there has been sound change ə> Ø before liquids; for sound change to occur the basic form of the word must be permanently altered; no variation should occur!

The regularity of sound change

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every instance of the sound undergoes sound change

e.g. **every** OE k > t͡ʃ / _____ i

every OE ū > aw
OE *hūs* > NE *house* [aw]
mūs > NE *mouse*
lūs > NE *louse*

Types of sound change

The development of OE ū > NE *aw* is an example of **unconditioned sound change.**

sound change affecting every occurrence of a sound so that no conditioning factor can be identified

The development of OE *k* > t͡ʃ / _____ *i* is a **conditioned sound change**

sound change that affects sounds in certain identifiable phonetic environments

Most common unconditioned sound changes:

monophthongization, e.g. ME *rɪwdə* > NE *rude*
ME *nɪwə* > NE *new*

diphthongization, e.g. OE *hūs* > NE *house* [aw]
mūs > NE *mouse*
lūs > NE *louse*

raising/lowering, e.g. ME *nōn* > NE *noon* [u]

backing/fronting, e.g. at the beginning of NE period *a* > *æ* in words such as *calf*, *path* etc.

Most common conditioned sound changes: assimilation, dissimilation, deletion (syllable structure processes or weakening processes), insertion (syllable structure processes)

Phonetic and phonemic sound change

Phonetic change refers to a change in pronunciation of allophones which has no effect on the phonemic system of the language.

Example: ME *p, t, k* > NE p^h t^h k^h

This sound change altered the pronunciation of the stop phonemes by adding one allophone to each phoneme, *but the phonemic system of English has remained unaffected*!

Phonemic change refers to sound change which changes the phonological system of a language.

Example: in OE /f/ had one allophone: [f], until about 700 A.D. At this time f > v / V_____V
Later borrowings from French containing *v* were pronounced with *v* instead of *f,* since the voiced sound already had occurred in the language a new phoneme has been introduced!

The patterns of sound change

Merger: see above

Split: replacement of a single distinctive segment by two or more segments in different phonetic contexts.

Conditioned merger necessarily coincides with phonetic split. If some allophones of a phoneme /x/ merge with /y/, a conditioned split in /x/ has occurred. This phenomenon is termed **primary split:**

 sound change affecting some allophones of a phoneme, which merge with another phoneme. No new phoneme is added to the sound system.

Example: Pre- Latin /s/ and /r/ phonemes remain distinct in Classical Latin, except in intervocalic position: s > r / V___ V (probably via *z*). Thus the phoneme /s/ splits into [s] and [r] while a merger occurs with the phoneme /r/.

Secondary split results from a change in the conditioning features of allophones.

 sound change whereby conditioned allophones of a phoneme become independent phonemes as a result of a change in the environment that served to condition the occurrence of that allophone.

Example: Skt velar stops become palatal affricates in the environment of front vowels (see p. 145).

Thus, Skt *k* splits into *k* and *c* [t͡ʃ]. But, subsequently the front vowel *e* merged with *a* and *o* as *a*, with the result that tokens of the phoneme /t͡ʃ/ come to occur in a non-palatal environment.

Skt *ca* 'and' < *ke (< *k^we) is distinguished from the root *ka* 'who' < *ko (< k^wo)

A change elsewhere in the system has given phonemic status to a segment introduced into the system as an allophone.