Language Change In some ways, it is surprising that languages change.Many present-day speakers find Shakespeare's sixteenth century texts difficult and Chaucer's fourteenth century Canterbury Tales nearly impossible to read.Yet it's clear that today's English speakers construct sentences very differently from Chaucer and 3 Shakespeare's contemporaries (see illustration above).Even without these kinds of influences, a language can change dramatically if enough users alter the way they speak it. Frequently, the needs of speakers drive language change.History records many examples of language change fueled by invasions, colonization and migration.Yet linguists find that all languages change over time--albeit at different rates.For example, while Japanese has changed relatively little over 1,000 years, English evolved rapidly in just a few centuries.Large-scale shifts often occur in response to social, economic and political pressures.New technologies, industries, products and experiences simply require new words.Vocabulary can change quickly as new words are borrowed from other languages, or as words get combined or shortened.As noted in the Linguistic Society of America's publication Is English Changing?, pea is one such example.Up until about 400 years ago, pease referred to either a single pea or many peas.At some point, people mistakenly assumed that the word pease was the plural form of pea, and a new word was born.After all, they are passed down through the generations reliably enough for parents and children to communicate with each other.The vocabulary and phrases people use depend on where they live, their age, education level, social status and other factors.Through our interactions, we pick up new words and sayings and integrate them into our speech.Types of Change Three main aspects of language change over time: vocabulary, sentence structure and pronunciations.Why They Change Languages change for a variety of reasons.Plastic, cell phones and the Internet didn't exist in Shakespeare's time, for example.But the unique way that individuals 1 2 speak also fuels language change.Teens and young adults for example, often use different words and phrases from their parents.By using new and emerging terms, we all drive language change.That's because no two individuals use a language in exactly the same way.Some of them spread through the population and slowly change the language.While vocabulary can change quickly, sentence structure--the order of words in a sentence--changes more slowly.Changes in sound are somewhat harder to document, but at least as interesting.Some words are even created by mistake.

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