I. AUFSÄTZE

Two True/False Principles of Language Change

Older (and, alas, some younger) linguists have held two inde-
fensible views of language change. To go back, e.g., to Max
Müller (who, incidentally, admitted the role of fashion in
change), he agreed with many historical linguists of his day in
taking his subjekt matter, change, to be – curiously enough
– deleterious: Müller regarded innovation with jaundiced eyes.
In addition to the view that change is harmful to languages, a
second view emerges in Müller's thinking: Diversity of place, or
isolation, results in diversity of language. In accord with evi-
dence against an unqualified presentation of this view stands
Labov's (1966, p. 7) summation of his findings:[1]

> Traditional dialect studies have shown [??] that isolation
> leads to linguistic diversity, while the mixing of popula-
> tions leads to linguistic uniformity. Yet, in the present
> study of a single speech community, we will see a new and
> different situation: groups living in close contact are par-
> ticipating in rapid linguistic changes which lead to
> increased diversity, rather than uniformity.

It is the object of this note to show that the tradition is in
error – Labov's findings are more general than he apparently
dreamed – and to draw the reader's attention to the opposite
principles of linguistic change:

1) Change fills a linguistic need and mostly results in
   improvements.
2) Contact is the source of important language changes
   [diversity of place does not cause change unless it results
   in extensive contact with other ways of speaking].

---

[1] My views of what should replace the approaches of traditional dialectology
and of sociolinguistics are detailed in Bailey 1980a and 1987b.

On the first point, the writer (cf. references in Bailey 1982, p. 49) has suggested that new dialects and languages arise where there is a sociocommunicative need, not (as in the traditional view) for no external reason at all. Dutch did not yield to Afrikaans (a daughter language of Dutch), or English to Bislama, Krio, Sranan, and Tok Pisin (daughter languages of English), nor indeed Old French and Anglo-Saxon to Middle English, in the absence of a need for something that must be viewed as linguistic "betterment", i.e. something paving the way to something more suitable to the sociocommunicative need. The absence of the communicative dimension in linguistics has led to outrageously counterintuitive reasons for change and linguistic creativity. The burden of proof lies on those that would maintain the counterintuitive viewpoint. Why such a view has seemed reasonable to some specialists in language change must be due to confusing isolation-with-contact and isolation in the absence of contact with other languages. I do feel impelled to remark on how many historical linguistics use static models at war with historical-comparative linguistics (Bailey 1980b, 1984, 1985a, b, 1987a; note especially the migration paradox discussed in Bailey 1982, p. 49–50 and earlier work). Indeed, some "historical" Anglisten would appear to proceed on the assumption that change stopped at the time of World War II; and they seem strangely unaware of, and singularly illequipped to detect, changes currently taking place in English: These might as well not be occurring, for all the recognition they get (cf. Bailey 1987b, Appendix A). However much some books on linguistics may proclaim the non-corrupting nature of change and even the axiological neutrality of change, many historical and "synchronic" linguistics act as though they wished or even believed that change didn't occur nowadays.[2]

---

[2] In a recent article on the "Segmental phonology of modern [sic] English" (Linguistic Inquiry 16, p. 57–116), M. Halle and K. P. Mohanan cite (e.g. p. 93) usages from J. S. Kenyon's and T. A. Knott's 1944 pronouncing dictionary. This latter writing represents, with many errors and a very inadequate transcriptional system, a situation long since transformed by far-reaching demographic and linguistic changes (including unconditioned vowel-shifts in the Great Lakes urban areas and elsewhere, as well as conditioned shifts in some

Concerning the second principle, what could be clearer than the archaism of Classical Arabic, so little changed despite the wanderings of the Bedouin, and the Polynesian languages, mutually intelligible two hundred years ago, despite the great local diversity of the Islanders; and what could be more striking than the contrast between these and "languages in contact" like koiné Greek and the diverse languages of the single (large but circumscribed) territory of Papua/New Guinea? The evidence of commonsense observation thus supports the results of Labov's research cited above. Again – but with no wish to flee the fray – I claim that the burden of the argument lies with those who would go on maintaining the contrary view that dialect and language diversity are caused by isolation.[3]

How and why contact causes change has been discussed by me in literature cited above: As borrowing and mixture occur, the connatural patterns of languages are violated; and this triggers changes to set them right again (cf. Bailey 1982, p. 56-57, 66-71).

It is time for historical-comparative linguists to retur to considering general principles, to considering the very models they employ and the laws of change (cf. Bailey 1985 b, etc.). Too long have they unreflectingly accepted insufficiently and uncritically examined notions about linguistic change as well as theoretically defective (cf. Bailey 1985 a) and (when empirically tested) discredited models. Too long have historical-comparative linguistics immersed themselves totally in the analysis of microdata with tools and hand, victims of unexamined theory while

---

areas) affecting the data themselves, speakers' evaluations of the data, and which varieties are superseding which. Dialectologists write books describing situations true of rural areas thirty or more years ago as though the descriptions were valid for today. The static mentality is indeed all-pervasive. And, while one might expect historical linguists to have proffered reasonable grounds for the origin of new languages, these seem to be generally lacking (see Bailey 1987 a). See n. 3.

[3] In Bailey 1987 a, I emphasize P. Mühlhäusler's (1986) emphasis on discontinuity in the emergence of new languages, on "catastrophic" development along with gradual development.

claiming disinterest in theory. It has not always been so. Have historical linguists had their fingers so badly burned that they are unwilling to deal with basics, i.e. with the premises on which their work and its validity depends? I hope that historical linguists will not go on another hundred years – as physicians did with leeching against all the evidence – holding views that are really not sustainable.

References

Bailey, Charles-James, N., 1980a, Conceptualizing dialects as implicational constellations rather than as entities boundered by isoglossic bundles, Dialect und Dialektologie, eds. J. Göschel, P. Ivic & K. Kehr, Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner Verlag, p. 234–272.
–, 1980b, Old and new views on language history and language relationships, Kommunikationstheoretische Grundlagen des Sprachwandels, ed. H. Lüdtke, Berlin, De Gruyter, p. 139–181.
–, 1982, On the yin and yang nature of language, Ann Arbor, Karoma.
–, 1984, The concept of balance and linguistic naturalness, Language sciences ("Language in a semiotic frame") 6, p. 229–238.
–, 1985a, The proper job of the historical-comparative linguist, Grammatische Kategorien, Funktion und Geschichte, ed. H. Schlerath with V. Rittner, Wiesbaden, Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, p. 58–70.
–, 1985b, Towards principles governing the progress and patterning of phonetological change, Developmental mechanisms, ed. Ch.-J. N. Bailey & R. Harris, Oxford, Pergamon Press, p. 1–49.
–, 1987a, A note on reconstructing language development, MSS. 48, p. 5–14.
–, 1987b, Variation theory and so-called 'sociolinguistic grammars', Language & communication 7, p. 269–291. [See Appendix on the new historical linguistics.]
Halle, Morris & K. P. Mohanan, 1985, Segmental phonology of modern English, Linguistic Inquiry 16, 57–116.
Kenyon, John S. & Thomas A. Knott, 1944, A pronouncing dictionary of American English, Springfield, G. & C. Merriam Company, Publishers.
Labov, William, 1966, The social stratification of English in New York City, Washington, Center for Applied Linguistics.
Mühlhäusler, Peter, 1986, Pidgin and creole linguistics, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, Pidgin and creole linguistics.

TU-Berlin,   Charles-James N. Bailey
FB. I, Institut für Linguistik,
Ernst-Reuter-Platz 7, 8. OG.,
D-1000 Berlin 10