

Ling 97: Sound Change and Phonological Theory Syllabus

Keith Plaster

kplaster@fas.harvard.edu

OH: Mondays 12-1pm, Ling. Dept., or by appt.

1. Goal of this Tutorial

In this tutorial, we'll examine what may be the most studied type of language change: sound change. We'll begin by reviewing various theories proposed from the late 19th century through today about the nature of sound change and how and why sound change occurs. We'll then turn to a number of strongly debated questions, including:

- Is sound change really exceptionless?
- How does a change spread – abruptly and simultaneously everywhere the particular sound occurs, or on a word-by-word basis?
- What causes a sound change to succeed or fail?

We will also look at the debate over the place of synchrony (in the form of universals or “goals” for change) and diachrony (in the form of phonetic causes) in motivating sound change.

2. Requirements

- Readings: We'll usually have 1-2 required readings for each week, which will relate to the topic(s) to be discussed that week. I'll post additional optional readings as well.
- Assignments: There will be one problem set (assigned on March 13), and over the tutorial everyone will give a short (~20 minute) presentation of a published article relating to a sound change in progress.
- Paper: Everyone will write a short final paper (5-10 double-spaced pages) on a topic of his or her choice (but relating to some aspect of what we cover in the tutorial), after consulting with me. Paper topics are due on April 17, and the final paper will be due on May 16 (the last day of reading period).
- This syllabus, all readings, lecture slides, and the problem set will be posted on the web: www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~kplaster.

3. Grading

- Attendance and participation: 25%
- Problem set and presentation of article: 25%
- Final paper: 50%

4. Schedule

After the first week, we will divide each class between discussion of the particular topic indicated below and analysis of a documented sound change in progress (based upon published articles). Each week, one student shall present an article describing a sound change in progress.

<p><u>March 20</u>: Introduction to sound change. Introduction to change; examples of sound changes; the phonetics of vowels; the comparative method.</p>	<p><u>HW</u>: Problem Set #1; (Presentation)</p> <p><u>Reading</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campbell Ch. 2 (for overview of sound change) (just skim) • O'Hala: Phonetics and Historical Phonology (read for discussion) • <i>Optional</i>: O'Hala: The Listener as a Source of Sound Change (classic paper on the phonetic basis of sound change)
<p><u>April 3</u>: Why does sound change occur? Phonetics/contact vs. teleology?</p>	<p><u>HW</u>: (Presentation) <u>Reading</u>: TBA</p>
<p><u>April 10</u>: Is sound change really exceptionless? The Neogrammarian hypothesis vs. lexical diffusion</p>	<p><u>HW</u>: (Presentation) <u>Reading</u>: TBA</p>
<p><u>April 17</u>: How does a sound change spread? Evidence from lexical diffusion, categorical changes vs. gradient changes</p>	<p><u>HW</u>: (Presentation) <u>Reading</u>: TBA</p>
<p><u>April 24</u>: Why does one sound change succeed, but another possible change fail? Teleological factors, phonetic factors, sociolinguistic factors</p>	<p><u>HW</u>: (Presentation) <u>Reading</u>: TBA **paper topics due**</p>
<p><u>May 1</u>: Conclusions</p>	<p><u>HW</u>: Final paper due by May 16th</p>