

## LANGUAGE AS A LIVING ORGANISM: GROWTH, CHANGE, AND DEATH OF WORDS

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**Abstract:** *Language is the living breath of humanity – growing, adapting and carrying within every word the heartbeat of the people who speak it. Therefore, it is always described as an organism because it grows through communication, changes and sometimes it loses parts of itself which are no longer needed. The research aims to understand why these changes happen and what they reveal about the society. It also shows that language is not a fixed system but a living form of expression.*

**Key words:** *Language, words, language changes, communication, organism.*

### INTRODUCTION

Language has oftentimes been compared to a living organism as it constantly grows, adapts and evolves with the humans who use it during their everyday communication. It is clear that language was created so many years ago and until now the language is developing, people are using a diverse range of new words, collocations and even idioms. As the linguist Edward Sapir (1921) once wrote, “Language is a living thing. It grows and changes. Whatever is alive changes.” This view captures the essence of language as something that cannot be frozen in time. It develops naturally, just as a living creature responds to the changes in its environment. Furthermore, David Crystal (1995), one of the most influential modern linguists, also reminds us that “Language changes because people change.” This idea shows that the life of language depends on the life of its speakers. When human needs, technologies, and ideas evolve, language follows. New words are born to express new realities, while others gradually disappear when they no longer serve a purpose. In this way, language mirrors the life cycle of living beings—birth, growth, transformation, and sometimes death. Just as living beings must evolve to survive, language also must change to remain useful and meaningful. It absorbs influences from other languages, borrows new forms, and sheds what no longer fits. As the famous philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1922) said, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” This statement emphasizes how deeply language is tied to human life—it grows as our world grows, and it fades when our ways of seeing the world change. So, understanding language as a living organism allows us to



appreciate its beauty, complexity, and deep connection to the human experience.

As it is mentioned above, language changes. However, why these changes actually happen? Language changes for many natural and social reasons. Linguists agree that these changes are not random – they happen because language reflects human needs, society and communication.

1. Contact between languages

There are a lot of different words which are taken from other languages. In other words, when people interact with one another through media, trade or others, they borrow different words. In English, there are also words that were borrowed from French, Arabic or Latin such as café, algebra or others. For example, the English word café was borrowed from French, which itself originated from the Turkish word kahve and the Arabic qahwa, meaning “coffee.” This shows how languages naturally borrow and adapt words through cultural contact and trade.

2. Simplification

Over time, people speak by simplifying the words and making the language simpler. While difficult forms disappear, easier ones survive. This is the reason why words shorten in everyday speech. Speakers tend to shorten words and expressions to make communication faster as well, especially in informal or digital contexts. For instance, DM means direct message, LOL – laugh out loud, OK – all correct but in a humorous way it is all correct. William Labov (1994) explains this process clearly: “Language changes because speakers are constantly adapting their habits to achieve greater ease and efficiency.”

These simplified forms have become part of everyday speech, even outside online settings. As linguist Jean Aitchison (2013) notes, language constantly moves toward “economy of effort,” meaning people naturally choose the easiest and most efficient way to express themselves.

Comparison of Historical and Modern examples

If historical words are compared with modern ones, people come across a lot of both minor and major changes. As linguist Leonard Bloomfield (1933) observed, “The forms of language are constantly changing, every generation speaks differently from the last.” In earlier periods, changes happened slowly. Because communities were small, communication was also limited. However, over the time, when the trade, cultural contact and travelling around the world developed, new words, expressions entered in the life of people. As an example, many words like beauty or government in English, were taken from French. Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) wrote “Time changes all things; there is no reason why language should escape this universal law.” This insight explains



us that nothing else in life can remain fixed. Moreover, in the modern era, language changes happen incredibly fast due to technology, trade, travel, media and globalization. New words spread quickly among individuals. The words – selfie, meme and others - which were unfamiliar many years ago are now used globally in the world. John McWhorter (2001) notes that “Languages are not decaying but dancing—constantly reshaping themselves to fit the rhythms of the modern world.” It means, language change is not a loss, but it is a sign of flexibility. Because people are making them flexible and easy to use.

### **METHODOLOGY**

There is one experiment which was conducted by Simon Kirby and his colleagues (2008) at the University of Edinburgh. It was called as Iterated Learning Experiment and was aimed at observing “life cycle” of the language. Groups of participants learnt new words and reproduced an invented language in some rounds. Through this approach the researchers observed meaning emerged through repeated use and adaptation.

The experiment covered overall 60 participants and they were divided into six separate groups consisting of 10 individuals in each group. Every participant only interacted with the data that the previous member produced. It explains how one generation learns new words, expressions and generally, language from the previous one.

### **MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE**

The researchers created artificial mini-language which consisted of overall 30 shapes or objects and 30 words which were totally unfamiliar to each participant. Every member of the group was given 30 minutes to learn those new words and their meanings. For this task, they were provided with a computer program. Then, the participant was asked those new words and meanings they remembered while showing the shapes. This output became input data for the next participant. The session took 20 minutes, but full experiment continued five days. It was approved by the University of Edinburgh`s Ethics Committee.

### **REASON & DISCUSSION**

The main reason for conducting this study was to observe the participants how they are learning and adapting to the new language and to see how languages can change when passed from one generation to another. In this experiment, Simon Kirby and his colleagues observed how random words can be meaningful over the time that is similar to a living organism which grows and adapts.

Initially, when the first group learnt the new words, the accuracy rate was only 32%. Because participant forgot the words and confused them. However,



the words passed through several groups and the accuracy rate gradually improved. By Generation 5, it has increased to 58%, and by Generation 10, it reached approximately 82%. Participants managed to create natural connections with the words and shapes. Because of the fact that the vocabulary was short, they could remember both the words and shapes. So, these results clearly demonstrate that the language evolve through repetition and adaptation over time. Like a living organism, the artificial language changed to suit the learners` memory and communication needs.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study shows us that language is much like a living organism, grows, adapts over the time. The experiment carried out by Simon Kirby and his colleagues also explains us how languages evolve in society and become simpler. In conclusion, language is not a fixed system and its growth & change are outcomes of human interaction.

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