

The Role Of Spoken Language In Language Change: Evidence From English And Uzbek

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Abstract

Language change is a continuous and inevitable process shaped by the communicative practices of its speakers. This article explores the central role of spoken language in linguistic change through a comparative analysis of English and Uzbek. Drawing on sociolinguistic theory, usage-based models, and grammaticalization frameworks, the study demonstrates that everyday spoken interaction functions as a primary source of phonological, grammatical, lexical, and pragmatic innovation. While written language tends to preserve standardized norms, spoken language provides a dynamic environment in which new forms emerge, spread, and gradually become conventionalized. The comparative perspective reveals both universal mechanisms of change driven by speech economy, frequency of use, and interactional needs, as well as language-specific patterns shaped by typological differences and socio-historical contexts. The findings highlight the importance of spoken data for understanding ongoing processes of linguistic evolution in both English and Uzbek.

Keywords: spoken language, linguistic change, English, Uzbek, sociolinguistics, grammaticalization, usage-based linguistics

Introduction. Language is a living system that evolves alongside its speakers and their communicative practices. Over time, phonological patterns shift, grammatical structures develop, lexical items emerge and disappear, and pragmatic conventions are reshaped.¹ Traditional historical linguistics has often relied on written texts as the primary source of evidence for language change. However, it is increasingly recognized that most linguistic innovations originate in spoken language, which constitutes the primary medium of everyday communication.² Spoken language is characterized by immediacy, interaction, and flexibility, making it a fertile ground for linguistic experimentation and gradual change.

The present study investigates the role of spoken language in linguistic change, focusing on English and Uzbek as two

typologically and historically distinct languages. English, an Indo-European language with a long history of documentation and global spread, provides abundant evidence of spoken-driven change documented in corpora and sociolinguistic research.³ Uzbek, a Turkic language with strong oral traditions and relatively recent processes of standardization, offers an important comparative perspective that highlights how spoken language influences linguistic change beyond Indo-European contexts.

The main objectives of this article are threefold. First, it aims to analyze how spoken language contributes to phonological, grammatical, lexical, and pragmatic change in English and Uzbek. Second, it seeks to identify common mechanisms of spoken-driven change, such as frequency effects, reduction, and

¹ Trask, R. L. (2015). *Historical Linguistics* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

² Biber, D., Conrad, S., & Reppen, R. (1999). *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. London: Longman.

³ Crystal, D. (2003). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

interactional needs. Third, it explores language-specific pathways of change shaped by typological structure and socio-cultural conditions. By addressing these objectives, the study contributes to a broader understanding of the relationship between spoken language and linguistic evolution.

Objective of the study. English has been extensively studied from the perspective of spoken language change. Research on colloquialization, grammaticalization of periphrastic constructions, and the emergence of discourse markers provides ample evidence of the central role of spoken interaction in shaping modern English. For instance, the increasing use of “going to” as a future marker and the spread of reduced forms such as “gonna” illustrate how spoken usage influences grammatical development. In contrast, Uzbek has received comparatively less attention in international linguistics, although regional scholarship has documented changes in spoken Uzbek related to urbanization, language contact, and sociopolitical change. The influence of Russian during the Soviet period and the growing impact of English in the post-independence era have introduced new lexical items and patterns of usage into spoken Uzbek. These changes highlight the importance of spoken language as a mediator of external influences on linguistic structure.

Methodology. The present study adopts a qualitative comparative approach, drawing on descriptive data from spoken English and Uzbek. The analysis is informed by existing corpora of spoken English, such as the British National Corpus (spoken component), as well as published descriptions and examples of spoken Uzbek in linguistic literature. In addition, illustrative examples from everyday spoken

interaction are used to demonstrate key patterns of change. While the study does not rely on large-scale quantitative corpus analysis, it aims to provide a theoretically informed and empirically grounded account of spoken-driven change in the two languages.

Presentation and discussion. One of the most salient features of spoken language is phonological reduction, which arises from the need for articulatory economy in rapid, informal speech. In English, reduction processes such as elision, assimilation, and contraction are widespread in everyday conversation. Expressions like “going to,” “want to,” and “got to” are frequently realized as “gonna,” “wanna,” and “gotta” in spoken discourse. These reduced forms illustrate how repeated spoken usage leads to phonetic erosion, which may eventually contribute to morphological and grammatical change. The grammaticalization of periphrastic constructions in English provides a clear example of spoken-driven change.⁴ The use of “be going to” as a marker of future intention originated in concrete motion contexts but gradually developed into an abstract future tense marker through frequent spoken usage.⁵ Similarly, the progressive aspect has expanded its functional range in modern English, reflecting changes in how speakers conceptualize and express ongoing actions in conversation. In Uzbek, spoken discourse contributes to the development of new grammatical tendencies, particularly in the use of auxiliary-like constructions and pragmatic particles. Frequent spoken usage of certain forms may lead to their reanalysis as grammatical markers, illustrating processes analogous to grammaticalization observed in English, albeit within a different typological

⁴ Bybee, J. (2006). From usage to grammar: The mind's response to repetition. *Language*, 82(4), 711–733.

⁵ Hopper, P. J., & Traugott, E. C. (2003). *Grammaticalization* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

framework. Lexical change represents one of the most visible domains of linguistic evolution influenced by spoken language. Spoken interaction functions as a primary channel through which new words, expressions, and meanings are introduced into a language. Because everyday communication is closely tied to social practices, cultural trends, and technological developments, spoken language is particularly responsive to changes in speakers' social environments. As a result, lexical innovation often emerges first in informal spoken contexts before being codified in dictionaries or adopted in formal written registers. In English, a large number of lexical innovations originate in spoken discourse, especially within youth culture, professional communities, and digital communication environments. Slang expressions, colloquial idioms, and neologisms are frequently introduced through spoken interaction and later spread through media and popular culture. For example, words such as cool, awesome, and more recent expressions associated with digital culture initially gained currency in informal speech. Over time, some of these items undergo semantic bleaching and become part of general vocabulary, illustrating how spoken usage can drive lexical conventionalization. In Uzbek, lexical change in spoken language is strongly influenced by language contact and socio-cultural transformation. Historical contact with Russian has resulted in numerous loanwords that first entered Uzbek through spoken bilingual interaction, particularly in urban settings.⁶ More recently, the increasing influence of English through technology, education, and global media has introduced new lexical items into everyday Uzbek speech. These borrowings are often adapted phonologically and

morphologically to fit Uzbek linguistic patterns, demonstrating how spoken interaction mediates the integration of foreign elements into the lexicon.⁷ Furthermore, spoken Uzbek exhibits internal lexical innovation in the form of colloquial expressions and idiomatic phrases that reflect local cultural practices and social identities. Such expressions may remain confined to informal speech or regional varieties, but in some cases, they spread more widely and influence the standard language. This dynamic illustrates the central role of spoken language in lexical creativity and change across different sociolinguistic contexts. Pragmatic change refers to the evolution of how language is used in interaction to achieve communicative goals such as managing turn-taking, expressing stance, and negotiating social relationships. Spoken language, as the primary medium of face-to-face interaction, is particularly rich in pragmatic markers and discourse-organizing elements. These features often arise from lexical items that acquire new interactional functions over time. In spoken English, discourse markers such as you know, I mean, well, and so play crucial roles in structuring conversation, signaling speaker attitudes, and managing interpersonal relations. These markers typically originate from lexical or syntactic constructions with more concrete meanings but gradually develop specialized pragmatic functions through frequent use in spoken interaction. For instance, you know has evolved from a literal expression of shared knowledge into a multifunctional discourse marker used to maintain conversational flow and establish rapport. Similarly, spoken Uzbek makes extensive use of discourse markers and pragmatic particles such as ya'ni (that is), demak (so), and

⁶ Thomason, S. G., & Kaufman, T. (1988). *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁷ Aikhenvald, A. Y. (2006). *Grammars in Contact: A Cross-Linguistic Typology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

other conversational elements that organize discourse and signal speaker intentions. These markers facilitate coherence in conversation, indicate inferential relations, and help speakers manage interpersonal dynamics. Over time, the frequent use of such markers in spoken interaction may lead to their conventionalization as integral components of the discourse system, reflecting processes of pragmaticization analogous to those observed in English.

Sociolinguistic factors play a crucial role in mediating the influence of spoken language on linguistic change. Variation in spoken usage is often correlated with social variables such as age, gender, social class, and regional background.⁸ Linguistic innovations typically emerge within specific social groups and spread through patterns of social interaction. Youth language, in particular, is frequently identified as a key source of innovation, as younger speakers tend to experiment with new forms and expressions as part of identity construction. In English-speaking communities, numerous studies have documented how changes in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary are led by younger speakers and urban populations.⁹ Informal spoken registers serve as sites of innovation, from which new forms may diffuse into wider usage. Media and digital communication further accelerate this process by amplifying spoken-driven innovations and exposing them to broader audiences.

In the Uzbek context, sociolinguistic factors such as urbanization, bilingualism, and generational differences significantly shape patterns of spoken language change. Urban youth, in particular, often exhibit innovative linguistic practices influenced by contact with Russian and English, as well as by digital communication platforms. These practices may include code-switching, the

incorporation of loanwords, and the adoption of new discourse styles. Over time, such spoken innovations may influence broader patterns of usage and contribute to ongoing processes of language change within Uzbek-speaking communities.

Conclusion. The comparative analysis of English and Uzbek demonstrates that spoken language plays a central role in linguistic change across typologically diverse languages. In both cases, spoken interaction serves as the primary site of phonological reduction, grammatical innovation, lexical creativity, and pragmatic development. Universal tendencies of spoken language, such as the drive toward articulatory economy, the influence of frequency of use, and the demands of real-time interaction, shape patterns of change in both languages. At the same time, language-specific factors influence the particular pathways of change. English, with its analytic structure and extensive global use, exhibits strong tendencies toward periphrastic grammatical constructions and the widespread diffusion of spoken innovations through media and international communication. Uzbek, as an agglutinative language with strong oral traditions and significant contact-induced change, demonstrates different patterns of spoken-driven change, particularly in the integration of loanwords and the development of pragmatic particles.

In conclusion, spoken language should be recognized as a primary engine of linguistic change rather than merely a reflection of changes documented in written records. The comparative perspective adopted in this study underscores the need for greater attention to spoken data in linguistic research, particularly in underrepresented languages such as Uzbek. Future research

⁸ Labov, W. (1994). *Principles of Linguistic Change*, Vol. 1: Internal Factors. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁹ Tagliamonte, S. (2012). *Variationist Sociolinguistics: Change, Observation, Interpretation*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

may benefit from large-scale corpus-based studies of spoken Uzbek and longitudinal analyses of spoken interaction to further elucidate the mechanisms through which everyday communication shapes the evolution of language.

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