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1 LANGUAGE CHANGE AND VARIATION

Systems reorganise themselves.

Must is slowly becoming less common; *got to* / *need to* are becoming more common.

May is developing a new use.

That was a crazy thing to do – you may have killed yourself!

Going to has become more and more common over the centuries.

Unimportant distinctions disappear.

First-person *shall* is on the way out. So is *whom*.

Who did you vote for?

Like is moving into the territory of *as*.

like you said *He looks like he's got a problem.*

Sounds weaken and disappear.

I better go home now. *You wanna come with us?* *I dunno.*

We got a new dog.

New forms come into the language.

He was like 'What do you mean?' *Are you guys ready?*

Prestige varieties influence others.

British *railway station* is becoming *train station* under American influence.

British plural concord with collective nouns (e.g. *The team **are** playing really badly*) is probably becoming less common under American influence.

Mistakes spread through the language

Seasons Greeting's *Women's' Services*

It sunk without trace.

Words change their meanings.

Refute is often used to mean 'deny'.

Prevaricate is often used for 'procrastinate'.

Flout is often used to mean 'flaunt'.

In the end, some mistakes become correct. (Most of today's grammar is yesterday's mistakes.)

a concerted effort *referendums* *This is very reliable data.*

Some 'mistakes' aren't: it's just that the rules are not completely true.

Lloyds Bank ... has opened a Home Loan Account for you on 19th May.

I'm loving it.

Some 'mistakes' are perfectly correct in the right place. Spoken grammar is not written grammar.

John and me saw a great film yesterday.

If you'd've asked me I'd've told you.

Language change and variation are natural and inevitable.

Languages don't degenerate. They change, like landscapes.

2 WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT IT?

As language teachers, how do we handle the changes that are going on now in English?

KEEP CALM

The changes we see are ripples on a vast ocean.

STAY INFORMED

We need to *know* what's new, whether or not we need to *teach* it.

We can stay informed with the help of:

- younger people
- up-to-date pedagogic resources:
 - good grammars and usage guides
 - good monolingual and bilingual dictionaries

BE REALISTIC

- We can only teach a small part of a language anyway.
So prioritisation is essential: concentrate on what matters most.
The things that are changing may not all be very important.
- Native-speaker competence is not a realistic aim.
Native-speaker usage is a valuable *model*, but not a *target*.
- Perfectionism can be disastrous. Good enough is good enough.
- Correctness is important. but we must always ask:
 - How much do we need?
 - How much can we achieve?
 - How much can we afford?
- Remember: rules are approximations. The language hasn't read the grammars.
- We must help learners to understand all of this.

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