

SYNTACTIC CHANGE (Supplement)

Syntactic change is sometimes described as an “elusive process as compared to sound change” (Labov)

Its puzzling nature is due to its *variety*.

For example:

The octopus which I caught.

The octopus that I caught.

The octopus I caught.

Is this variation a signal for change in progress???

Stylistic variations can persist for decades without involving change.

However: Variation creates a situation in which change can easily occur.

All change involves variation. The reverse is not necessarily true.

The existence of options:

Celtic has verbs at the beginning of sentences.

Welsh: Lladdodd y draig y dyn.

Killed the dragon the man

The dragon killed the man.

PIE: OV order; but verbs could be moved to the front in certain circumstances, like in English today:

Up jumped the tiger/The tiger jumped up.)

The Celtic languages never lost this option.

Later, constructions without an overt subject have developed:

Old Irish:

Egthir immum.

It-is-screamed about me

I heard a scream

Doeth ó Ailill
It-was-come from Ailill
Ailill sent them.

The verb-beginning options became more common, and gradually became the norm.

The varying of options is therefore an important mechanism of change.
