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ENG501 — History of English Language

Assignment No. 1 — Fall 2026

A synchronic study looks at a language at one point in time, and contemporary English shows clear changes at every level, driven by culture and technology. These changes do not mean English is decaying; they show it adapting to new ways of living and communicating.

1. Lexical change

The most visible changes are lexical. Technology has produced hundreds of new words — to google, to zoom, streaming, cloud, hashtag, selfie, doomscrolling — and old words have gained new meanings: viral now describes online popularity, tablet a device, wall a social media page. Blending is highly productive (phygital, infodemic, podcast from iPod + broadcast), as are acronyms and initialisms (FOMO, LOL, DM, ASAP), which suit fast digital typing. Culture has added words too: ghosting and gaslighting name modern relationship behaviours, while borrowings like hygge and emoji (from Japanese) reflect global cultural contact.

2. Grammatical change

Grammatical change is also clear. The singular they (“Someone left their bag”) is now standard, driven by the cultural need for gender-inclusive language. Progressive forms are extending to stative verbs in advertising and speech (“I’m loving it”), and the get-passive (“got fired”) is replacing be in informal use. Who is replacing whom almost everywhere, and prepositions are dropping in phrases like “meet Friday.” In youth speech, quotative like (“She was like, no way”) has become a normal way of reporting speech.

3. Spoken and digital change

Spoken English shows phonological and discourse changes. Uptalk (rising intonation on statements) and vocal fry have spread widely through media and youth culture, and t-glottaling (pronouncing butter as “bu’er”) is now common far beyond London. In digital writing, punctuation itself has changed meaning: a full stop in a short text can now sound angry or cold, while emojis and GIFs carry the emotional and paralinguistic information that tone of voice carries in speech. Hashtags mark topics, abbreviations save time, and sentence fragments are normal in messages.

Together, these synchronic changes show English responding to two forces: technology, which demands speed, brevity, and new vocabulary; and culture, which demands inclusivity, informality, and global connection. English is not becoming worse — it is becoming different, as it always has.