# MA ELT

## Sociolinguistics (Eng510)

Fall 2021

Assignment No. 1

Total Marks: 20

Lectures: 1-9

**Instructions**:

- Upload your assignments in a proper format, i.e. MS word file. Corrupt files will be awarded zero marks.
- The assignments should be zoomed in at 100%.
- Please avoid plagiarism; plagiarized work will be marked zero.
- After the due date, the assignments submitted via email would not be entertained.
- Please avoid submitting copied assignments; otherwise, such a case would be referred to the discipline committee.
- The font color should be preferably black and font size 12 Times New Roman.

**Q. The British linguist David Crystal says, "The only languages which do not change are dead ones." Elaborate this explaining how language change is inevitable. Also describe an example of a linguistic change in progress and discuss possible social motivations for this change. (10+10=20 Marks)**

It has been a constant for at least 2,100 years that people have suspected the next generation to be a bunch of layabouts who are

about to bring society to its knees – and this view is often reflected through language. For example, almost weekly, the “quality dailies” in the UK have cause to fill their letters columns with letters not just decrying young people, but particularly decrying their use of the language, and the decline in the English language generally. All kinds of appalling errors, from using the accusative after the copula (“It is me”) or splitting the infinitive (“to boldly go”) are pointed to as evidence for the inevitable collapse of English-speaking civilization as we know it. (Or is that “civilisation”?)

Roman poets did it too. There were people even before the birth of Christ who were condemned for “dropping the h” (as is now common in all daughter languages) or not pronouncing medial nasals (so that, for example, at that stage the Latin “mensa” was already pronounced more like the modern Spanish “mesa“). Yet the glorious age of Classical Latin was in fact still to come!

The lesson here, in language as in society, is that change is inevitable and in fact it is rarely a bad thing. Languages, just like people, have to adapt to changing circumstances – not just to the effects of semantic shifts vowel levelling and diphthong reductions but also new technology, new cultural norms, and now modes of communication itself. These make life easier, not harder.

Languages perceived to be "higher status" stabilise or spread at the expense of other languages perceived by their own speakers

to be "lower-status". Historical examples are the early Welsh and Lutheran Bible translations, leading to the liturgical languages Welsh and High German thriving today, unlike other Celtic or German variants. For prehistory, Forster and Renfrew (2011) argue that in some cases there is a correlation of language change with intrusive male Y chromosomes but not with female mtDNA. They then speculate that technological innovation (transition from hunting-gathering to agriculture, or from stone to metal tools) or military prowess (as in the abduction of British women by Vikings to Iceland) causes immigration of at least some males, and perceived status change. Then, in mixed-language marriages with these males, prehistoric women would often have chosen to transmit the "higher-status" spouse's language to their children, yielding the language/Y-chromosome correlation seen today.