

## Temporal aspects of language change: what can we learn from the CEEC?

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My paper discusses the time course of a number of morphosyntactic changes in Renaissance English. It is surprisingly seldom that linguistic changes have been attributed a more accurate timing than a 'full' period, such as Late Middle English or Early Modern English. My study will give a more precise timing to the diffusion of the changes under scrutiny among the population of England. Both the macro- and micro-level will be taken into account and changes presented as S-curves.

In addition to timing, the following questions will be raised on the macro-level. How should we define the beginning and end of a change? At what rate do changes proceed? What are the factors that play a role in the progression of a change?

On the micro-level, individual speakers are in focus. How do individuals behave in relation to on-going changes? Do they change their language during their lifetimes? If they do, where shall we look for reasons?

The data are retrieved from the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (CEEC), compiled at the University of Helsinki by the project 'Sociolinguistics and Language History'. The CEEC contains around 6000 letters from 1417-1681, forming a corpus of 2.7 million words especially designed for studies in historical sociolinguistics.

The following changes will be dealt with: replacement of subject YE by YOU, third person singular suffix -TH versus -S, loss of multiple negation, object of gerund constructions, possessives MINE and THINE versus MY and THY, and introduction of possessive ITS.

### References

- Nevalainen, Terttu & Helena Raumolin-Brunberg (eds.) 1996. *Sociolinguistics and Language History. Studies Based on the Corpus of Early English Correspondence*. Amsterdam/Atlanta GA: Rodopi.
- Nevalainen, Terttu & Helena Raumolin-Brunberg (in preparation). *Historical Sociolinguistics*. Longman.