

Homework assignment #3: Morphological and syntactic change

Due Wednesday, October 3

- (1) Consider the underlined verb form in the following quotation. The usual past tense form of this verb would be *arrived*. Name the kind of change at work here and attempt to explain how the new form has come about.

“We were also open to the possibility that the sort of graphics we’d always imagined would arrive had just arrove, in the form of horrendously potent processors, powerful software and terrifying acceleration.”

From www.penny-arcade.com

- (2) Expressing the meaning ‘with’ in languages of the Balto-Finnic family

<i>Finnish</i>	<i>Karelian</i>	<i>Veps</i>	<i>Estonian</i>	<i>Vote</i>	<i>Livonian</i>
kanssa	kanssa	-ka	[-ka]	ka:sa	ka:zu
(word)	(word)	(suffix)	(suffix)	(word)	(word)

- (a) Do you think the morpheme meaning ‘with’ is more likely to have changed from a suffix to a word in Finnish, Karelian, Vote, and Livonian, or more likely to have changed from a word to a suffix in Veps and Estonian? (Don’t base your answer simply on the number of languages in each group; look for a more specific argument.)
- (b) Based on the information seen here, do you predict that the languages in this group have SVO or SOV as their basic constituent order? Why?
- (3) Here is an example of a syntactic change that has taken place in some dialects of American English. Read the “background” and propose an answer to the “question”.

I. Background

In English, nouns and adjectives can both be used “predicatively” (as the predicate of a sentence in combination with a form of the verb *to be*). This is shown in the following examples.¹

- (a) That movie was *boring*. (adjective)
 (b) That movie was *nonsense*. (noun)

Adjectives can be placed immediately before nouns to modify (describe) them. Nouns of the kind seen in (a) above can sometimes be used this way as well, although not all speakers find this to be possible.

¹ Not all nouns can be used without an article/determiner (like *a* or *the* or *some*) in this construction. It seems to work best with certain abstract non-count nouns such as *nonsense*.

- (c) That was a *boring* movie.
- (d) ?That was a *nonsense* movie. (acceptable for some speakers?)

However, there are many differences between the two categories noun and adjective. For example, *very* can be used to intensify adjectives, but not nouns. (Here, the symbol ✕ is used to mean ‘ungrammatical,’ so that we can reserve ‘*’ for ‘reconstructed form’.)

- (e) That movie was very *boring*.
- (f) That was a very *boring* movie.
- (g) ✕ That movie was very *nonsense*.
- (h) ✕ That was a very *nonsense* movie.

On the other hand, the phrase a lot of can be used with nouns, but not with adjectives.

- (i) ✕ That movie was a lot of *boring*.
- (j) That movie was a lot of *nonsense*.

II. The question

In older stages of American English, speakers had the following judgments about (k)-(o).

- (k) The movie was fun.
- (l) ? That was a fun movie. (acceptable for some speakers?)
- (m) ✕ The movie was very fun.
- (n) ✕ That was a very fun movie.
- (o) The movie was a lot of fun.

However, there are some dialects of American English that have undergone a change involving the word fun, so that now **all** of the sentences in (k)-(o) are acceptable.

What kind(s) of syntactic change was/were involved in this change in the word *fun*? Explain your answer. You may wish to review section 12.4 in *IHL* as you work on this problem.