

Why do languages change?

All languages change; the only languages which do not change are dead ones, like Latin, or formal ones, like mathematics. Languages change because they are spoken by people, and people change. People move, talk to and marry other people from different backgrounds, and try to better themselves in the changing societies in which they live. While they are doing so, they listen to the other people they meet and react to those other people in subtle ways, notably by changing their language. However small these changes might be, ultimately they can result in a big effect in a remarkably short space of time.

Does language change happen slowly?

Language change happens most quickly in societies undergoing rapid change or where there is a good deal of contact with the outside world. It happens much more slowly in stable or isolated societies. **English** changed very quickly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a result of the growth of towns and the rise of a middle class in these towns. However, **Icelandic**, spoken by a close-knit community cut off from most of the outside world for much of its history, has changed little in the last thousand years.