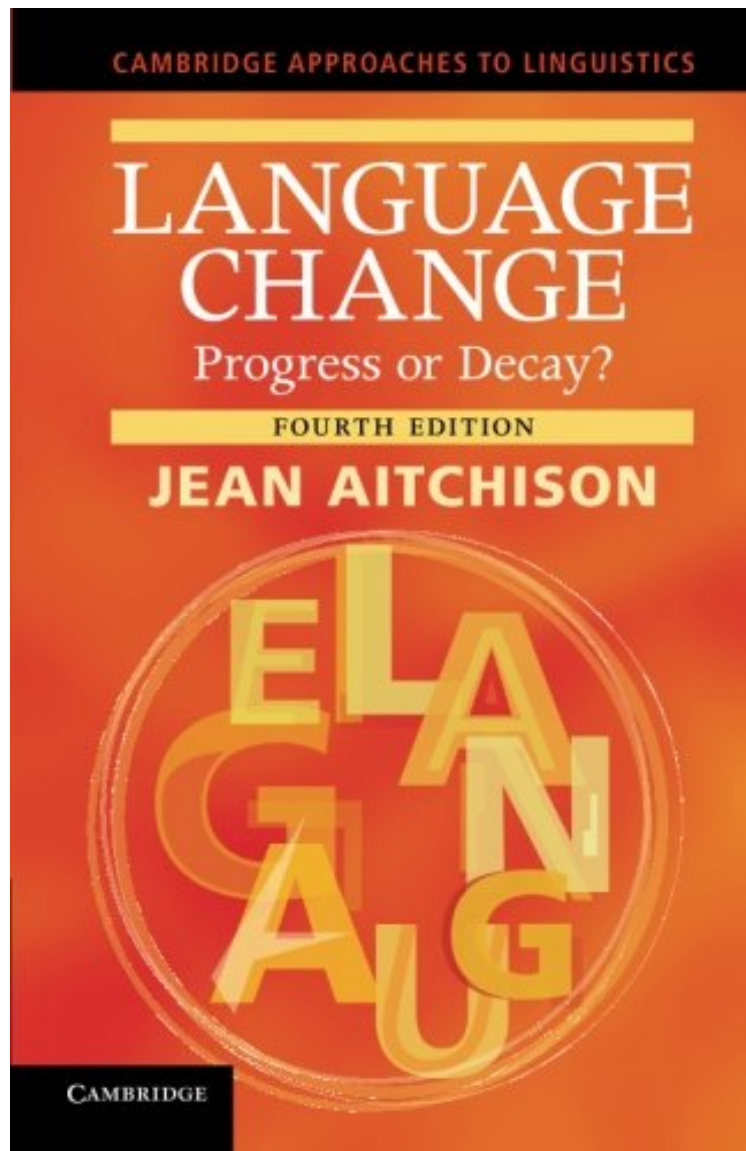


(Download free pdf) Language Change: Progress or Decay? (Cambridge Approaches to Linguistics)

Language Change: Progress or Decay? (Cambridge Approaches to Linguistics)

Jean Aitchison

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Jean Aitchison : Language Change: Progress or Decay? (Cambridge Approaches to Linguistics) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Language Change: Progress or Decay? (Cambridge Approaches to Linguistics):

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GradExcellent reading. A very friendly discourse without going into too much technical details.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. GreatBy pat s.Terrific7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Written at a fairly simple level, but the information is useful even to experienced studentsBy Christopher CulverWhile its title might make the book seem a collection of papers taking sides in a debate, LANGUAGE CHANGE: Progress or Decay is a textbook written by Jean Aitchison introducing contemporary study of language change to beginning students of linguistics. The book has proven quite popular for its gentle tone and its clear summarization of important work in the field, and has now gone through several editions.I read this as a graduate student of historical linguistics, and I had several years of experience in the field. For all its simplicity, however, Aitchison's book was relevatory. Those with training in the Indo-European or Uralic language families tend to think of language change as some abstract sequence of events that are cleanly reconstructed with the comparitive method. Our traditional handbooks are rather divorced from contemporary research and don't consider the "why" and "how" of language change. Aitchison remedies this by considering language as a product of human beings, with all of their social pressures and insecurities. She first presents the work of William Labov, who viewed language change in progress in 20th-century new York. His work tells us about how varying standards of pronunciation in a given population spread or die depending on social prestige.Another matter this student of historical linguistics was unclear about is exactly why sounds tend to change along the same lines in all language families. Everyone knows that final consonants tend to be lost, labiovelars stops may become /p/ or /b/, and /l/ often shifts to /w/. Aitchison explains the physical causes for these common phonetic and ultimately phonological changes. By far the most rigorous and useful chapter for me was "The Mad-Hatter's Tea Party", an admirably easy-to-grasp explanation of push chains and drag chains with plenty of examples.As for the question in the subtitle, Aitchison ceaselessly stresses that language change is natural and unavoidable. She quotes from a long line of English-language purists, from Jonathan Swift to William Safire to show the absurdity of seeking to freeze language at a given moment. At the same time, she emphasises that languages do not evolve towards some ideal, but rather endlessly wheel about from one configuration to another.I highly recommend this book to any student of historical linguistics. Even if you have some training in the field, you're bound to find something new and exciting in Aitchison's text.

How and why do languages change? Where does the evidence of language change come from? How do languages begin and end? This introduction to language change explores these and other questions, considering changes through time. The central theme of this book is whether language change is a symptom of progress or decay. This book will show you why it is neither, and that understanding the factors surrounding how language change occurs is essential to understanding why it happens. This updated edition remains non-technical and accessible to readers with no previous knowledge of linguistics.

"Jean Aitchison's *Language Change: Progress or Decay?* has been essential introductory reading for students of historical linguistics for many years: it manages the rare trick of combining theoretical sophistication and clear, simple (but not simplistic) expression. This new edition, which takes account of current issues in language-change studies while not discarding classic discussions, remains a fine and very approachable survey. I shall certainly recommend it to my undergraduates." Jeremy J. Smith, University of Glasgow
"A brilliant essay in linguistics ... Even in the most complex spaghetti junctions of her argument, her own directions are always clear, and her own language lively, fresh and stimulating." *The Guardian* "... captivating and highly readable ... linguistic phenomena are lucidly explained, often through the use of analogy, graphics and clear examples taken from a range of different languages. A new and welcome addition to this fourth edition are the questions placed at the end of the book - three for each chapter - which help readers to test their understanding of the main points." Ilse Wischer, translated from *Zeitschrift fr Dialektologie und Linguistik*
About the Author
After many years lecturing with the University of London (at the London School of Economics and Political Science), Jean Aitchison was Professor of Language and Communication at the University of Oxford (1993-2003) and is now an Emeritus Professor. She is the author of a number of books on language, including *The Language Web* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).