

Seeking evidence for interaction as a motivation for language change

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Most functional linguists currently assume that language change is at least in part due to negotiation of meaning in interactional situations throughout life (Milroy 2003), rather than solely to passive early language acquisition by children, as proposed by Lightfoot (e.g. 1999). The question, then, arises “What evidence is there of the effects of interactional negotiation in historical texts?” Absent examples of natural conversation, the best resources are represented interactions in drama, epics and novels, and, in some cases, transcripts of trials (Culpeper and Kytö 2000). Turn-taking (which is not limited to naturally-occurring conversation) has been hypothesized to be an important strategy that may lead to change (Detges 2006). So have contesting “dialogic” contexts (Traugott 2008). I show what kinds of evidence we can find in seventeenth and eighteenth century corpora such as *The Old Bailey Proceedings 1674-1834* (Huber 2007) for the development of WH-pseudo-clefts (*What I said was ...*) from anaphoric, “backward-looking” expressions into the kinds of partially formulaic “forward-looking” expressions that have been identified in present day English conversation (Hopper and Thompson 2008).

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