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Corpus of Changes: Descriptors

Descriptors - General

Date

Historical period(s) at which the change is thought to have taken place.

Variable and/or irregular

This descriptor indicates that the result of a change does not show classical neogrammarian "exceptionlessness". That is, a reasonable body of unaffected forms occurs in the environment for the change. This accounts for irregularity resulting simply from the nature of a change (e.g. one that never affects all possible environments or only affects a few items), and irregularity resulting from the change being in process of diffusion when we encounter it in our data. This is a formal not a regional category.

Regionally or dialectally restricted / differentiated

This descriptor indicates that the change is evidenced differently in different regions and/or is restricted to a particular region or regions. Where the change is regionally or dialectally restricted, we normally indicate the area(s) or dialect(s) in which the change is attested. Where no such indication is given, this means that the change occurs cross-dialectally but differently in different dialects.

Morphologically conditioned

This descriptor indicates that the change requires for its statement reference to a morphological category or categories. This does not include changes sensitive only to boundaries which in the usual poststructuralist sense are considered to be phonological.

Descriptors - Domain

Level

Used in the conventional linguistic sense to distinguish the arena of action. The levels are: phonological; morphological (incl. bound morphemes and morphosyntactic phenomena); lexical ("words" in the usual sense, i.e. free morphemes); orthographic.

Segment type

Indicates whether the change involves only vowels, or only consonants, or whether it can involve either.

Prosody

For changes involving vowels, indicates whether the change operates only in strong syllables or only in weak syllables (possibly because the relevant phonological environment happens to distribute in this way). Changes that involve vowels regardless of prosody are marked 'neutral'. This descriptor does not apply to epenthetic vowels between two consonants; these may occur in strong or weak syllables or at the boundary between two syllables.