I stand by my views on local place name pronunciations

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■ Too many people mispronounce the name of the popular park in Norwich as 'Hy-um' rather than the correct 'Hay-um'.

Picture: **LIBRARY**

Some people tell me they're puzzled about my stance on language change.

On the one hand, I'm fascinated by current sound changes, like the two th sounds merging with f and v in "fing" and "bovver", and don't disapprove of them. On the other, I'm against changes in local place names, such as saying Heigham, Norwich, as "Hy-um" instead of the correct "Hay-um".

My position is easy to explain. The transformation of th is a natural, spontaneous sound change. The disappearance of k before n in all English words such as know and Knapton, which started in the 16th century, was a natural sound change. The change in all Anglo-Saxon words like cu and nu to Modern English cow and now, which took many centuries, was a natural sound change.

These are part of natural linguistic evolution. The sounds of all languages change over time. This mostly happens without anybody noticing, and certainly without anyone intending it. And all instances of a given sound are affected, without exception. Why? Well, languages are just like that.

Sound change is a powerful, inherent, unstoppable feature of human languages. If

you could hear Chaucer speaking, you'd barely recognise it as English.

His version of "When April with its sweet showers" was "Whan that April with his shoures soote", which sounded like "Hwan that Ahprill with hiss shoo-ress sawta".

Sound change is part of what gives us different dialects and, ultimately, different languages. If it wasn't for change, English and German would still be the same language. Even Welsh and Bengali would be the same language – they were 6,000 years ago.

Wrongly changing an individual name from, say, Heigham to Hy-um has got nothing to do with natural sound change.

It's simply people guessing from the spelling how an unfamiliar name is pronounced

and getting it wrong. When people wrongly say my name as Trudge-ill, I understand why – the spelling is ambiguous. But when I tell them what the correct pronunciation is, I expect them to use it – it's my name, after all.

One thousand two hundred years ago, Heigham was Heccham, pronounced "Hetch-ham". Our modern "Hay'um" came about through natural sound changes which occurred gradually over many centuries.

Any 21st century change to Hyum would be the sudden result of conscious but faulty decision-making by people from outside Norwich, encountering this particular name in writing before hearing it, guessing how to say it, and getting it wrong.

But we won't let that happen.