

INTRODUCTION: PRINCIPLES AND METHODS FOR HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS

SYNCHRONIC vs. *DIACHRONIC* analyses



Synchronic: this is the term used to characterize linguistic processes and states describable at a given moment in time.

Diachronic: This is the term used to characterize linguistic processes continuing through time.

Historical linguistics is concerned with *language change*. It is interested in what kinds of changes occur (and why), and equally important, what kind of changes do not occur (and why not).

Historical linguists attempt to determine

- the changes that have occurred in the history of a language;
- the relationship of languages historically.

Languages change in *all* aspects of the grammar: the phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic.

Languages change constantly!

SOUND CHANGE: Alternation in the phonetic shape of segments and suprasegmental features, resulting from the operation of phonological processes.

e.g., OE *eƿn* ‘even’ > WSax *em̄n*
 Lat *septem* ‘seven’ > Ital *sette* } Assimilation!

MORPHOLOGICAL CHANGE: Changes in the *system of forms* in a language.

e.g., OE plural forms:

<i>cwene</i>	‘queens’
<i>scipu</i>	‘ships’
<i>hundas</i>	‘dogs’
<i>suna</i>	‘sons’
<i>eagan</i>	‘eyes’
<i>word</i>	‘words’

NE -s, - əz /-z/

SYNTACTIC CHANGE: Changes in the variety of elements that go into the syntactic structuring of a sentence.

OE *fæder u:re* > NE *our father*

NOTE: Syntax has been widely neglected by historical linguists until relatively recently.

SEMANTIC CHANGE: Changes in the meaning of words.

OE *hund* ‘dog’ > NE *hound*

dogs in general > a particular breed of dog

Some basic historical linguistic terms:

Etymology: the technical term referring to the study of the history of words.

feather [OE] < Gmc *fethro* (Ger. *feder*, Du. *veer*, Sw. *fjäder*) < IE **pet-* (Lat. *penna*)

Cognates: Words that have descended from one and the same word of the protolanguage.

Hu. *fon* = Vogul *pon* = Ostyak *pun* = Cheremis *pun* = Fi. *puna* = Est. *puna* < PFU * *puna*

Etymological doublets: Two different words in one language having an identical etymological source.

shirt < Gmc. **skurt* : *skirt* < Old Norse *skyrta* ‘shirt’

Etymon is the form from which another developed.

PIE **treis* is the etymon of NHG *drei*

Gloss: it identifies another word.

Skr. *tráias* ‘three’

Reflex: the form that has developed from an earlier form.

NHG *drei* is a reflex of PIE **treis*

GENEALOGICAL vs. TYPOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION

Genealogical classification:

On the basis of

- i. similarity of basic vocabulary elements,
- ii. systematic similarities and differences in the sounds and grammatical forms

it may be concluded that certain languages are RELATED: they belong to the same LANGUAGE FAMILY.

DETERMINATION OF LANGUAGE FAMILIES IS KNOWN AS
GENEALOGICAL CLASSIFICATION.

Fr. <i>cher</i>	Ital. <i>caro</i>	Span. <i>caro</i>	Port. <i>caro</i>	'dear'
<i>champ</i>	<i>campo</i>	<i>campo</i>	<i>campo</i>	'field'
<i>chandelle</i>	<i>candela</i>	<i>candela</i>	<i>candeia</i>	'candle' cf. Lat. <i>cande:la</i>
<i>chez</i>	<i>casa</i>	<i>casa</i>	<i>casa</i>	'house' cf. Lat. <i>casa</i>

Fr. [ʃ] = Ital. [k] = Span. [k] = Port. [k]

Lat. [k] > Fr. [ʃ], Ital. [k] or, Fr. [ʃ], Ital. [k] < Lat. [k]

> became, developed to
< developed from

Fr. *école* Ital. *scuola* Span. *escuela* Port. *escola* 'school' cf. Lat. *schola*

Here the [k] was protected by the following [o].

Study 1.2, pp. 2-3.

Typological classification:



based on the insight that languages can be divided into a number of basic types, each with its own set of characteristics.

Typological theory covers *all* areas of the grammar. Linguistic systems are governed by general principles -- *universals*!

Examples:

Phonological typology -- may involve assessing the number and type of sounds in a given language; syllable structure type, etc.

Morphological typology: assessing the way in which morphemes are put together (analytic vs. synthetic types)

Syntactic typology: e.g., word order typology

Typological and genealogical classifications are *independent* of each other. For example, Hindi and Armenian are related to English, are OV languages; French, Modern Greek and English are VO languages.

METHODS USED IN HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS

a. The comparative method

The major reason for the systematic comparison of languages is the desire to establish language relationships: we want to determine (i) what languages have descended from a common protolanguage and (ii) how closely these languages are related.

Two tendencies make it possible to determine language relationships:

- i. the form and the meaning of the word is arbitrary -- thus it is reasonable to assume that two or more languages which share similar forms and meaning are *related*.
- ii. sounds do not change randomly: regularity!

Two or more languages which are related will show regular sound correspondences.

Example: Proto Balto-Finnic (Exercise #1)

Study 1.1-1.4, pp. 1-4.

b. The method of internal reconstruction



Procedure for inferring part of the history of a language from material available for a synchronic description of the language.

Assumption: paradigmatic allomorphy is not original; it reflects the results of historical developments.

By contrasting the irregularities with the regular patterns we can reconstruct earlier forms.

Example: Fijian (Exercise #1)

