

## 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

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

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

Languages change constantly!

Study the Handout and the examples in the on pp. 1-2!

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

e.g.    OE *efn* ‘even’ > WSax *em̥n*    }  
          Lat *septem* ‘seven’ > Ital *sette*    } Assimilation!

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

e.g.    OE plural forms, e.g.

<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 /-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

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Some basic historical linguistic terms:

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

*feather* [OE] < Gmc *fethrō* (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 *skyrtá* 'shirt'

## **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 <i>GENEALOGICAL CLASSIFICATION</i> .
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Example: p. 6.

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*!

Typological and genealogical classifications are independent of each other.

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

## 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 (Handout)

### 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 (Handout)

