

A key requirement for this course is writing a term paper. The paper need not be particularly long (something on the order of 10-12 pages should suffice) but the topic **must** be fairly circumscribed (partly to prevent you from getting in over your head in an area that requires more expertise than you could reasonably be expected to have as students just embarking on the study of historical linguistics).

At the same time, it is desirable, both from my point of view and from yours, that you get started on original research in historical linguistics if possible. For me, that would show you that the subject (historical linguistics) is an area that is accessible to all linguists, given the appropriate starting assumptions, and something all linguists should be aware of. For you, original research, where you can show creativity and initiative in thinking, is more satisfying and interesting than simply reporting on other people's research (and for Linguistics grad students, it can provide an opportunity for the type of paper you can adapt for their second-year "Colloquium Paper", or add to your second-year portfolio, if you are so inclined). Both types of papers, however, are acceptable and suitable for this course, and even the "report"-type papers will require you to produce some creative syntheses and evaluations of other researchers' results.

Below are several topics which are suitably delimited yet sufficiently interesting to engage your attention. You need not restrict yourselves just to this list — if something else interests you, it should be all right, as long as you clear it with me beforehand. In any case, feel free to discuss the appropriateness of your topic, or anything else about it, with me.

To ensure that these are not done at the last minute, the following timetable is to be adhered to:

---end of the fourth week ( <b>Friday 1/26</b> ):	an indication in writing of your <b>topic</b>
---end of the sixth week ( <b>Friday 2/9</b> ):	a brief (one paragraph) <b>progress report</b> on your work on the paper
---end of ninth week ( <b>Friday 3/2</b> ):	a 500-word <b>abstract</b> of the paper (details in a homework assignment)
---beginning of exam week ( <b>Monday 3/12</b> ):	<b>finished paper</b> to be turned in (prefaced by a 200-word abstract).

(Note: the statement of topic, the progress report, and the abstract will be treated as homework assignments (specifics to be given on the abstract assignment; I will be glad to read a first draft, and return it to you with comments (no grade), if I have it by Friday 3/2).

#### TOPICS:

1. Take a controversial subgrouping or claim of language relationship, such as Italo-Celtic or Balto-Slavic within Indo-European; Japanese, Korean, and Altaic; Indo-European and Semitic; Basque and Caucasian; Wiyot, Yurok, and Algonkian; Algonkian and Muskogean; or any other (consult with the instructor for additional cases). Present a careful summary of the evidence on both sides of the question and some indication of how to evaluate the opposing claims.
2. Take a feature found in several languages of a "Sprachbund" (e.g. of the Balkan languages, the South Asian languages of the Indian subcontinent, the languages of the Pacific Northwest of North America, etc.), and state the facts about its distribution throughout the relevant languages and evaluate the evidence for that feature being the result of language contact and convergence or the result of independent developments in the individual languages involved.
3. Take a word, in any language you care to choose, which has several different etymologies proposed for it or which is labeled "of obscure etymology" (or the like; consult an etymological dictionary of the relevant language), and present the details of the various proposals with an indication of how one might go about evaluating them.
4. Read Mark Aronoff's "Automobile Semantics" (*Linguistic Inquiry* 12 (1981), 329-347). Concentrating on his model of rapid semantic/lexical change for a small but complex sector of the lexicon, do a study of a lexical subset, e.g. foreign car names (but see his footnote 11), other products (stereos, computers, or the like), etc., and/or survey a small but representative set of speakers to see if Aronoff's (and Putnam's) contentions regarding a "division of linguistic labor" are borne out. (NB: if you do this, be careful to keep it focused on diachronic consequences, however interesting the purely synchronic angle might be.)
5. Everyone's speech is a mix of forms that have been acquired at different points in one's development. Moreover, the sources of these forms are often quite varied. Try, through introspection and careful monitoring of your own usage over several weeks (keeping a diary might be useful) to determine the sources of your own vocabulary and pronunciations and grammatical forms; relate your findings to what is known about *dialect borrowing* (see, e.g., Bloomfield 1933 or Hockett 1958, as well as Hock and Hock & Joseph, on this notion) and about change in an individual's language throughout his/her lifetime.
6. One area of language use that often shows relatively rapid change is the "slang" part of speakers' lexicons. Accordingly, it is fertile ground for original historical linguistic research. Examine some class/subclass of slang usage for evidence of change. You might examine older and more recent slang dictionaries and compare some set/subset of terms, or do a survey of your own and compare it with your own usage from some time ago (or that of friends or family, to the extent that you can accurately reconstruct it). Be careful to distinguish regional variation from true diachronic variation, and be sure to check any words/phrases/usages you come up with on your own with those in slang dictionaries for certainty as to the novelty of the item in question. Try to draw some general conclusions on the nature of the changes you discover and the mechanisms behind them. (NB: if you do this, be careful to keep it focused on diachronic consequences, however interesting the purely synchronic angle might be.) The recent book by Connie Eble on College slang might be another useful resource.
7. Take a dictionary of a reconstructed proto-language (e.g. *Proto-Pomo* by S. McLendon (P25C15 v. 71), *A Proto-Algonquian Dictionary* by G. Aubin (PM605A9), *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary* by T. Burrow & M. Emeneau (PL4609B81984), etc., but NOT any for Indo-European, since that has been fairly thoroughly done), and based on the reconstructed lexicon, do a 'linguistic palaeontology' study of the proto-culture, exploring all angles this takes in and integrating data from real historical, cultural, and archaeological findings. (For some examples and discussion, see Anttila 1972, §20.14-5, Hock & Joseph Ch. 18, and "Indo-European and the Indo-Europeans" by Calvert Watkins (in the *American Heritage Dictionary*, 1992 ed'n, pp. 2081-9).)

8. Examine the diachronic side of a visually/manually-based language such as American Sign Language (or any of the well-developed sign languages in existence). How, if at all, do changes in signs through time parallel changes in orally-based languages? Explore possible explanations for such parallels, if they exist, or for the lack of such parallels, if you find none.
9. Some researchers consider the ultimate question in diachronic linguistics to be that of where human language came from in the first place. Though it is not even clear that an answer is possible, there are many hypotheses that have been put forth. By working through some of the extensive literature on the subject (see Notes in Hock & Joseph, the 1997 review article in *Diachronica* by C. Callaghan, and the recent book (1999) by A. Carstairs-McCarthy, for instance), give a balanced view of the contribution that linguistics and especially historical linguistics can make towards this question.
10. Select a classic problem in the historical grammar of some language that you are familiar with or are interested in (an examination of standard reference books on the historical grammar of the language in question should yield some areas where problems remain or areas which have been the source of considerable debate over the years). Then summarize what the issues are and what various solutions to the problem(s) have been proposed, providing some evaluation as well of the different suggestions. (Be careful to choose a focused problem, so you don't get involved in more than you can handle--see me for some suggestions, if you like.)
11. Brent Berlin & Paul Kay (1969/1999, 1997) have proposed that distinctions in basic color terms are added in a relatively fixed order to a language. Review their typological evidence for this claim and later critiques of their evidence, and attempt to assess the historical development that they have proposed using etymological dictionaries to determine the relative chronology and source (i.e., inherited from the relevant proto-language, via semantic shift, via coining, via borrowing, etc.) of various terms. Preferably this should be done with noncontiguous, nonrelatable languages. (NB: if you do this, be careful to keep it focused on diachronic consequences, however interesting the purely synchronic angle might be.)
12. If you know a language other than English well, try to find a (cooperative) speaker of that language who has lived in the US for a long time and who is willing to let you interview him/her, and try to see if you can discern any differences in that speaker's usage, compared with that of speakers who have not lived in an English-speaking environment. Discuss these differences, drawing on the discussion of language contact and language death in Hock and in Hock & Joseph (as well as other relevant bibliography).
13. Take a set of semantically related cognate terms, e.g. for cardinal directions or seasons or the like, for two or more related languages that have come to be spoken in different cultural, environmental, geographical (etc.) settings, and compare the ways in which the cognate terms have developed, by way of examining how any evident semantic shifts can be linked to the different settings the speakers found themselves in. See Carl D. Buck's *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages* for some examples from the Indo-European family.
14. There are a few types of historical linguistic problems in which mathematical/computational methods can be applied, e.g. in the determination of the role of chance in resemblances between and among languages, and in glottochronological/lexicostatistical studies of the time depth of relationships (see the 1986 book by S. Embleton for general discussion). Some of these might make for suitable projects for the term paper:
  - a. Read *On Calculating the Factor of Chance in Language Comparison* (D. Ringe, 1992) and subsequent works by Ringe on his methodology and using that as the basis for a pilot study of your own examining three languages of your choosing, two that are clearly related, though perhaps distantly so, and one that is either very distantly related or generally believed not to be related at all, apply Ringe's model to test the degree of chance resemblances that might arise (though see also the recent review of R's book by A. Manaster Ramer & W. Baxter in *Diachronica* on the mathematical bases of R's work, as well as the mathematical methods papers in Salmons & Joseph 1998 on Nostratic, the recent book by Mark Hubey, and papers by Goh and by Welby & Whitman in OSU Working Papers in Linguistics 52). Since this topic has been discussed a lot in recent years on the internet, see the archives of the LINGUIST List (<http://www.emich.edu/~linguist/>; e.g. postings by Jacques Guy).
  - b. Read *An Indoeuropean Classification: A Lexicostatistical Experiment* (I. Dyen, J. Kruskal, & P. Black, 1992) and using different languages (preferably non-Indo-European, though one might choose different dialects of languages they covered within IE), attempt a classification. In doing this, be sure to consider as well some of the older literature on the methodology, especially some of the negative ones (references in Hock, p. 676) and evaluate your success in the light of critical appraisals of the methodology. (Alternatively, you could (try to) use the GLOTTO program developed by Jacques Guy (for details, see the archives of the LINGUIST List (<http://www.emich.edu/~linguist/>)).
  - c. Survey the work on determining the best tree-like representation of language relationships -- see, e.g., the papers by Ringe et al. in *Transactions of the Philological Society* 2002, by Rexová et al. in *Cladistics* 19 (2003), by Gray & Atkinson in *Nature* 426 (2003), Eska & Ringe in *Language* 80 (2004), and references therein. Compare the techniques used and assess their validity, paying attention as well to the issue of parallelism between the enterprise of linguistic classification and biological classification.
15. Pick a variable feature in Modern American English usage (or in your native language) and explore it with regard to the question of whether it reflects stable variation or instead is variation that indicates a change in progress. You will need to work out the history of each variant (i.e. which is innovative, which is older) and to study the patterns of variation it shows (e.g. via a survey, a questionnaire, or the like, with a carefully selected sample). Possible features to look at include the use of *lie* vs. *lay*, *doesn't* vs. *don't*, *for you and I* vs. *for you and me*, among others.
16. Since a key issue in understanding language change is understanding its spread through a speech community, and since such spread is a social phenomenon, select some nonlinguistic socially spreadable feature, and investigate it, comparing the spread of a linguistic feature with the spread of a nonlinguistic feature. What similarities are there (are the same processes at work)? Are there any discernible differences in the spread of the two types of features? (You might note books like M. Gladwell's *The Tipping Point* though this is more about ideas than other social phenomena.)