

SOME RELEVANT NOTIONS FOR HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS

1. On the Relationship between Synchrony and Diachrony

	D	L1	Synchronic Stage 1
∨			
	I	L2	Synchronic Stage 2
∨			
	A	L3	Synchronic Stage 3
∨			
	C	L4	Synchronic Stage 4
∨			
	H	.	.
∨			
	R	.	.
∨			
	O	.	.
∨			
	N	Ln	Synchronic Stage n
∨			
	Y	Ln+1	Synchronic Stage n+1
∨			

2. Some Facts etc. Relevant to Various ‘Key’ Questions

- evidence for change

- documentation of previous language stages (via writing, films, tapes, etc.)
- observation within an individual’s life-span
- interpretation of synchronic variation
- comparative method

NB: COMPARISON is critical for all of these to provide evidence of change in language!

- factors that might conceivably affect change

- external conditions, e.g. social unrest, war, conquest, etc? Some certainly have an effect, e.g. in bringing in opportunities for contact with different speakers, or creating new social structures that speakers must respond to (e.g. terms of address after French Revolution), but there is no clear evidence for significant correlation with a greater RATE of change in such circumstances
- system-internal factors, e.g. is a densely packed acoustic and articulatory space just asking for a change? Case in point: Serbian affricates (all voiceless):

Dental	[c]
Alveo-Palatal	[tʃ]
Palatal	[ç]

N.B.: some Serbian speakers have “dealt with” these by merging alveo-palatal and palatal!

- transitions: difficulty of positing intermediate stages in sound change:

Proto-Algonquian *k → Ø in Arapaho-Gros Ventre

e.g. *ka:ka:kiwa ‘raven’ → A-GV ooin (→ Arap. hóu.)

BUT: PA *h → A-GV h // PA *ʔk → A-GV ʔ

- systemic effects and interrelatedness of changes? Tosk Albanian denasalization— one process or two? (NB: both date to roughly the same period, as best we can tell):

a) Nasalized vowels → [- nasal] (using â for nasalized vowel)

e.g. *âftâ ‘(s)he is’ → aft(â)

b) n → r / V__V

e.g. *g’himeno- ‘winter’ → dimar(â)

- evaluation questions

--is a particular innovation/feature one that I as a speaker like?

--is a particular innovation/feature one that I as a speaker would choose to use in my own speech?

--is a particular innovation/feature one that I as a speaker would choose to avoid in my own speech?

3. Basic Premises of the Comparative Method

ONE FACT: There are correspondences of form between and among certain languages that are so numerous, systematic, and precise as to exclude CHANCE, BORROWING, and UNIVERSALITY as their cause

ONE HYPOTHESIS: these correspondences therefore are the result of these languages being ("GENETICALLY") RELATED, that is, deriving from a common source (a so-called "proto-language" or "parent language")

4. The Neogrammarian View of Sound Change

Sound Change is:

1. **REGULAR** (in the sense that ALL candidate forms for a particular change, once it is formulated appropriately so as to be restricted to a particular environment if the facts warrant it, and limited in space and time, undergo the change)
2. Conditioned only by **PHONETIC** factors; in particular, there is **NO** grammatical conditioning of sound change

Sound Change is therefore a mechanical process that operates without concern for word class, grammatical status, morphemic structure or the like; only phonetic factors such as adjacent sounds, prosody, etc. play a role in conditioning sound change.