

LINGUISTICS 301

Language Evolution and Language Change

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Course Description: In this course we survey different kinds of language evolution and change, their causes and the methods linguists use to analyze language change and to model the relationships between and among dialects and languages. Special emphasis is put on the role of **linguistic variation** and of **external influences** (e.g. social context, writing systems, contact with other speakers, contact with other cultures, self- and group-imposed ideologies and attitudes, etc.) in the historical development of languages and in bringing about linguistic differentiation and diversity. Counteracting forces of convergence through contact and of standardization are examined as well.

The course examines the phenomenon of language diversity from two interrelated perspectives: that of the investigation of **diachronic variation**, examining language change and evolution through time, and that of the investigation of **synchronic variation**, working from the observation that no two speakers, even of the same language or dialect, show complete isomorphism in all aspects of their language use. The inter-relationship between these approaches to linguistic diversity stems from the fact that change through time on the one hand is triggered by the intrinsic variation found at any synchronic stage and on the other hand generally leads to increased differentiation between varieties of speech, as speakers come to differ from one another in their speech habits; in this way, over time, both **dialects** within a language and **separate languages** can arise. Diversity is thus — somewhat paradoxically — both the beginning point of change and the result of change. Linguists are able to chart the paths by which diversity arises, and to work backwards from diversity to gain an idea of what a common starting point looked like for related languages.

Course Objectives: The main objectives for this course are:

- a. To develop notions about Language Evolution and Change
 - language change is perfectly normal and is to be expected
 - variation is the basis of language change and is the present-day (**synchronic**) reflection of historical (**diachronic**) developments as well
 - due to normal processes of language change, fluctuations, irregularities, and exceptions get into and stay in a language
- b. To understand the relationship between social factors, i.e. those external to the language system proper, and language change
- c. To develop methods used to learn about and analyze language change
 - examining language change in progress around us synchronically
 - comparative method in reconstruction changes from past
 - genetic classification
 - decipherment and philology

Textbook: Hans H. Hock & Brian D. Joseph *Language History, Language Change, Language Relationships: An Invitation to the Glamour and Verve of Historical Linguistics* (Mouton, 1996)

Course Requirements (and percentage towards final grade):

- 1. Keeping up with assigned readings..... 0% (but crucial to the successful completion of other requirements)
- 2. Homework Problems (10 in all)..... 10% (see below re homework policy)
- 3. Midterm Exam..... 20%
- 4. Final Exam (Comprehensive)..... 25%
- 5. Variation Project (details to be given later)..... 25%
- 6. Two Written Assignments (details forthcoming):
 - a. Questions re 1st Movie..... 10%
 - b. Report on Class Palaeontology Project..... 10%

Grading Policies

1. WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS AND VARIATION PROJECT: These must all be written in English that is *clear enough to allow me to be sure you know what you are talking about*. Thus, you should write in *complete sentences* and *coherent paragraphs* and make sure your writing is free from mechanical errors. Papers will be graded primarily on content, but matters of style, diction, organization, and grammar will count towards the grade, especially where errors and/or lapses interfere with the clear presentation of your ideas. Papers unacceptable due solely to poor writing *may be rewritten* (the two versions will be averaged to yield the ultimate grade). Where possible, you should feel free to turn in preliminary drafts (well before the due date) so that I may make suggestions on your writing.

2. HOMEWORK: Most of the homework assignments for the course (to be assigned periodically, roughly one per week) are short, designed to be done in less than an hour, and intended to give practice in material discussed in class or a taste of something new to base classroom discussion in the next session on. *Therefore, it is imperative to do the homework conscientiously and on time*. To guarantee that you will at least make an attempt to do the homework, the grading scheme is as follows: papers are graded on a 10-point basis, with 6 points awarded for doing the assignment and turning it in on time, and up to 4 quality points, depending on the quality of your solution. Late papers automatically lose credit, though turning in a paper late is preferable to not turning it in at all, for a missing paper receives a zero. Collaboration on homework assignments with classmates is perfectly acceptable; often two can learn more about an assignment by discussing it together. However, any work you turn in should be defensible as your own effort ultimately.

3. EXAMS: There will be one midterm exam, an in-class but open-book exam, near the mid-point of the quarter. There will be no make-up exam; if for some acceptable reason (e.g., illness, legitimately documented by a doctor) you must miss the exam, you will be responsible for a make-up assignment (a 5-page written report on some extra reading, details to be given) due in the next class session after you return to class; this make-up assignment will be very stringently graded and will count 20% towards your final grade, as the mid-term exam would). The final exam will be comprehensive and take place during the regular time assigned by the registrar's office; it too will be open-book.

4. **WRITTEN PROJECTS:** There are several written assignments that are part of the required course work; some are relatively minor while others are more major. Collaboration on these assignments with classmates is perfectly acceptable as far as discussing strategies and concepts is concerned; however, you may not share any part of the final product (except on the palaeontology project — details forthcoming) and any work you turn in must ultimately be defensible as your own effort and yours alone. Any work suspected of not adhering to this ethical standard will be referred to appropriate University disciplinary committees.

5. **GRADING SCALE:** The midterm and final exams will be graded on a 0-100 scale, with number grades corresponding to letter grades as follows:

94 - 100 = A	74 - 76 = C
90 - 93 = A-	70 - 73 = C-
87 - 89 = B+	67 - 69 = D+
84 - 86 = B	64 - 66 = D
80 - 83 = B-	60 - 63 = D-
77 - 79 = C+	0 - 59 = E.

Projects and written assignments will be graded on an A - E grade scale, which will be converted to a 100-point scale (for purposes of computing the final grade) according to the above values.

Students with Disabilities: Students who need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor to arrange an appointment as soon as possible to discuss the course format, to anticipate needs, and to explore potential accommodations. The instructor relies on the Office of Disability Services for assistance in verifying the need for accommodations and developing accommodation strategies. Students who have not previously contacted the Office for Disability Services are encouraged to do so (614-292-3307; www.ods.ohio-state.edu).

Academic Misconduct: To state the obvious, academic dishonesty is not allowed. Cheating on tests or on other assignments will be reported to the University Committee on Academic Misconduct. The most common form of misconduct is plagiarism. Remember that any time you use the ideas or the materials of another person or persons, you must acknowledge that you have done so in a citation. This includes material that you have found on the Web. The University provides guidelines for research on the Web at <http://gateway.lib.ohio-state.edu/tutor/>.

Topic Outline and Readings

WEEK 1: Introduction and Organization; Discussion of Course Goals; Introduction of Basic Linguistic Concepts — Phonetics; Morphology; Syntax; Lexicon

- Reading: Hock & Joseph Chapter 1; Appendix to Chapter 1

WEEK 2: Concrete Examples of Language Change/Evolution; Sound Change — definition, nature, examples, classification

- Reading: Hock & Joseph Chapter 4

WEEK 3: Morphological Change; Semantic Change; Lexical Change

- Reading: Hock & Joseph Chapters 5, 7, 9

Basic Linguistic Concepts — Variation in Individual and in Group Usage

- Movie ("American Tongues")

WEEK 4: Role of Variation in Change

- Project on Variation to be assigned ••
- Reading: Hock & Joseph Chapters 10, 11

WEEK 5: External Causation of Change--Social Factors, Standardization Pressures, Speaker and Group Attitudes, Effects of Literacy

- Reading: Hock & Joseph Chapter 12
- • **MIDTERM EXAM** • •

WEEK 6: ••Variation Projects DUE•• Discussion of Results

Comparative Method and Reconstruction

- Reading: Hock & Joseph Chapters 2, 16

WEEK 7: Genetic Classification of Languages — Methods and Results (Survey of major language families (Indo-European, Afroasiatic, Uralic, Altaic, Sino-Tibetan, Austronesian, etc.); linguistic diversity in the Americas; macro-comparisons)

- Reading: Hock & Joseph Chapter 17.1-4

WEEK 8: Origin of Language; Monogenesis; Birth of new languages: Pidgins & Creoles

- Reading: Hock & Joseph Chapter 17.5, 14

Language Contact and Borrowing

- Reading: Hock & Joseph Chapters 8, 13

WEEK 9: Linguistic Palaeontology — Reconstructing Cultures and Homelands (Indo-European and Semitic)

Class Exercise (••Assignment of Writing Assignment #2••)

- Reading: Hock & Joseph Chapter 18

WEEK 10: Discussion of Linguistic Palaeontology Exercise

Philology and Writing--History, Typology, Decipherment

- Reading: Hock & Joseph Chapter 3
- Writing Assignment #2 DUE
- MOVIE ("Champollion: Egyptian Hieroglyphics Deciphered")

Summation: Language Change — Progress or Decay?