

Intro to Linguistics – Historical Linguistics

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Overview of topics

1. What is Historical Linguistics
2. Two Approaches to the Study of Language
3. Development of English
4. Development of Czech
5. Kinds of Language Change
6. Language Families
7. Attitudes Towards Language Change
8. Sound Change
9. Comparative reconstruction

1 What is Historical Linguistics?

Historical linguistics studies:

- how languages *change* over time
- how languages are *related*.

Main theses:

- All languages change over time. The change is relatively slow.
- Languages do not change randomly.
- There are many patterns and generalizations we find out when examining the histories of various languages.

Note: Because devices for recording sounds have only been around for about a century, the vast majority of data used for historical linguistics is textual. This is only a matter of circumstance, however – as discussed before, the *spoken* language is primary; we only analyze the *written* language if we have no other options.

2 Two Approaches to the Study of Language

- **synchronic** – Study of language at one point in time (usually “now” – the modern form of a language).

synchronic: From Greek: syn (same, together) + chronos (time)

Cf. synchronize, synonym, symphony, synergy; chronicle, chronology, chronic

- **diachronic** – studies historic development of a language or languages. (compares the language with itself at different stages of its development)

diachronic: From Greek: dia (thru, across) + chronos (time)

Cf. diagonal, diarrhea (thru + flow), diagram, diadem (bound across), dialect (across + speak), dialog (across + speak), diameter (across + measure), diaspora

3 Development of English

1. Old English (OE, 450-1100)
2. Middle English (MidE, 1100-1450)
3. Early Modern English (1450-1700)
4. Modern English (ModE, 1700-present)

Major changes

1. Old English to Middle English
 - (a) Loss of /x/ (usually written as *gh*, German preserved it)
English: *right* [rait] *night* [nait] *neighbor* [neibər]
German: *rechts* [rext^s] *nacht* [naxt] *nachbar* [naxbar]
 - (b) Some allophones became distinct phonemes
[f]/[v], [ð]/[θ], etc.
 - (c) Loss of many final vowels > loss of case endings
 - (d) Word order became more rigid
 - (e) England under Norman (French) rule > about 10K French borrowings
 - (f) etc.
2. Middle English to Early Modern English
 - (a) The Great vowel shift – only [i] and [e] unaffected.
One vowel “pushed” another to a different place in the vowel chart.
e.g. ɔ > o > u > au > ɔ
[ur] > [aʊr] *our*, [namə] > [nem] *name*, [wid] > [waɪd] *wide*, etc.
 - (b) Simplification of some initial consonant clusters:
[kn] > [n] (*know*, *knee*, *knight*), [hr] > [r] (*hring* > *ring*), [wr] > [r] (*write*, *wrist*)

4 Development of Czech

1. Old Slavonic – no direct sources, reconstructed language
2. Old Church Slavonic (*staroslověnština*) – Literary language based on the Thessaloniki Slavic dialect, created Saints Cyril and Methodius in 800's.
3. Proto-Czech (1000-1150)
 - (a) V j V > V: (*dobraja* > *dobrá*)
 - (b) yers (ѣ and ѥ; reduced vowels): yer > 0 (odd yers from the end) / e (even yers)
okъno > *okno* but *okъnъ* > *oken*
 - (c) nasal vowels disappeared

4. Old Czech (1150-1250)

No continuous texts, mostly single words or glosses in Latin texts.

In comparison with modern Czech, Old Czech has: a full system of palatal and hard consonants, dual number, simple past tenses (aorist, imperfect), etc.

- (a) [a/æ] > [jɛ] (ě) after palatal/palatalized consonants. This led to differentiation between hard and soft paradigms
- (b) *g* > *h* (*gora* > *hora* 'mountain')

5. 1300-1400's

First longer written texts

- (a) Depalatalization – Old Czech had a full system of palatal and hard consonants, most of this is lost
- (b) Difference between *i* and *y* neutralized
- (c) Beginnings of: *ý* > *ej* (*být* > *bejt* 'to be') and *ú* > *ou* (*súd* > *soud* 'court')
- (d) Beginnings of protetic *v* before initial *o*: *vočno* 'window'
- (e) Simple past tenses disappeared
- (f) Standardization of orthography (probably by Jan Hus), diacritics replaces digraphs. E.g., *rz*, *rrz*, *rs*, *rzs*, *rzss*, ... > *dotr*

6. Humanistic period

Kralická bible published, several Czech grammars published

- (a) Dual number disappears except for certain nouns and agreeing attributes (*s dlouhýma rukama* 'with long arms', *dvě stě* '200', ...)

7. Baroque period

Czech is replaced by German in many situations.

- (a) *é* > *í*: *řéci* > *řící* 'say', *dobré mléko* > *dobrý mlíko* 'good milk'
- (b) dual endings used instrumental plural (-*ama*)

8. The National Renaissance

Creation/resurrection of Literary Czech on the basis of humanistic Czech ignoring 200 years of development and resulting in split between Literary and Common Czech.

5 Kinds of Language Change

Languages undergo changes at all linguistic levels: phonetic, phonemic, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic

1. Phonetic:

Old English had [y] (as [i], but rounded) and [x], Modern English has none of them

[y] was replaced by [i] or [ai]: [pyt] > [pit] *pit*, [my:s] > [mis] > [maɪs] *mice*.

Reduction of yers in Proto-Czech: *dьnъsь* > *dnes* 'today'

2. Phonemic:

In Old English [v] and [f] were allophones (variants) of one phoneme. In Modern English they are two distinct phonemes.

3. Morphological:

In OE, nouns had case endings (nominative, genitive, dative, accusative)

4. Syntactics:

In OE, all questions could be formed by inverting the subject and the verb.

In ModE, inversion possible only with auxiliaries, other verbs use *do*.

Old Czech had several simple past tenses, Modern Czech has only analytical preterite, some forms of aorist (one of the simple past tenses) are used as conditional auxiliary (*bych*)

5. Semantic & lexical:

In OE, *girl* referred to young men and women.

Czech: *pivo* any drink > beer

- (1) Shakespeare's time: *What thinkest thou?*
Modern English: *What do you think?*

- syntactic change – no auxiliary *do*
- morphological change – verb endings
- lexical change – *thou* is now obsolete.

6 Why Do Languages Change?

Languages change for a variety of reasons, for example:

- Economy: Speakers tend to use as little energy as possible to reach the goals of communication.
- Analogy: One part of the system (lexicon, morphology, ...) or even a single word or rule is modified to be more like other parts of the system.
- Change of context (society, culture, place)

- **Language split** – A language may split into two or more languages if the speakers become separated into two or more groups with little or no contact.

Latin > French, Provençal, Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese, Romanian.

English > British, American, Indian, South African, Australian, . . .

- **Borrowing** between language in contact (because of trade, etc.)

Mostly vocabulary. Less frequently in phonetics, phonology; sometimes also syntax, morphology and semantics.

English borrowed words from many languages (often via other languages), e.g., French (*design, court, table*), Latin (*deficit, sponsor*), Scandinavian lgs. (*they, law*), German (*kindergarten, noodle*), Spanish (*canyon, tornado*), Italian (*isolate*), Greek (*comedy, theater*), Native American lgs. (*chipmunk, kayak*), South Asian (*sandal*), Dutch (*cruise*), Arabic (*algorithm, giraffe, alcohol*), Chinese (*tea*), Russian (*czar*), Czech (*robot, howitzer*).

Czech borrowings: English (*gól, software*), German (*flaška, láhev*), Russian (*samovar*), Latin (*košile, norma, cirkus, minuta*), French (*toaleta*), Spanish (*armáda*), Italian (*banka,*), Greek (*kytara, symbol*), Turkish (*jogurt*), Arabic (*algebra, alkohol*), Chinese (*čaj* ‘tea’),

7 Attitudes Towards Language Change

People complained about deterioration of language forever.

There were many attempts to resist language change, defending it against:

- “invasion of barbaric” terms from other languages
- preventing “vulgar speech from corrupting” the language as a whole.

Many countries have/had language academies – institutions organized to attempt to regulate, stop, or even reverse language change.

Academies & government

- can force newspapers and book publishers to conform to specific guidelines,
- but they cannot control how people speak, and that’s where the language change originates.

You cannot prevent language change with any amount of force – it is an inherent part of every living human language.

8 Language families

We can classify languages by their origin into a tree similar to family trees.

Most of the European and some Asian languages evolved from a common ancestor called Proto-Indo-European.

Some of the subfamilies of **Indo-European** languages.

- Slavic
Czech, Russian, Polish, Croatian, Bulgarian, etc.
- Italic languages – Latin and its descendants (Romance languages)
Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, Romanian, etc.
- Germanic languages
English, German, Dutch, Afrikaans, Yiddish, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, etc.
- Celtic
Irish, Scots Gaelic, Welsh
- Indo-Iranian
Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu, Romany (Gypsy), Pashto
- Hellenic
Greek

Except Indo-European there are many other language families, for example:

- Sino-Tibetan languages
Mandarin (Chinese), Cantonese (Chinese), Tibetan, Thai
- Uralic languages
Hungarian, Finnish
- Afro-asiatic
Semitic languages (Arabic, Hebrew, Maltese), Somali, Egyptian (Ancient Egypt), etc.

There is about 7000 languages, originating probably in a small number of proto-languages.
For detailed classifications:

- <http://www.ethnologue.com>
- <http://www.krysstal.com/langfams.html>

9 Sound Change

A **Sound Change** is a phonological process which has been accepted by all speakers of a language (or dialect).

Sound changes tend to spread from speaker to speaker gradually in a wave-like pattern until they are uniformly used by all speakers in a linguistic community. They do not spontaneously occur everywhere in a language.

When:

1. **Conditioned** – the change happens only in certain phonetic environment
e.g. all [s] in front of a vowel change into [ʃ]
2. **Unconditioned** – the change happens regardless of the phonetic environment
e.g. all [s] change into [ʃ]

What:

1. **Assimilation:** Two sounds become more like each other when they are near or touching.
e.g. [wulfas] > [wulvas] ([f] is voiceless, both [l] & [v] are voiced)
2. **Dissimilation:** Two sounds become less like each other when near or touching.
e.g. [fifθ] > [fift] *fifth* (both [f] & [θ] are fricatives, [t] is a stop)
3. **Deletion:** Sounds are deleted in certain environments.
e.g. MidE [knɪxt] > ModE [naɪt] *knight* ([k] and [x] deleted)
4. **Insertion:** Sounds are inserted in certain environments.
e.g. [æθlit] > [æθəlɪt] *athlete*
5. **Monophthongization:** Diphthongs become monophthongs.
e.g. MidE [rʊlə] > ModE [rul] *rule*
6. **Diphthongization:** Monophthongs become diphthongs
e.g. MidE [u] > ModE [aʊ]: [hus] > [haʊs] *house*, [maʊs] *mouse*
7. **Metathesis:** The order of sounds change.
e.g. *ask* > *aks*
8. **Raising/Lowering:** The position of the tongue becomes either higher or lower when producing certain sounds.
e.g. [metə] > [mit] *meat*
9. **Backing/Fronting:** The position of the tongue becomes either more forward or more back.
e.g. [paθ] > [pæθ] *path*

Note: Always look at pronunciation not spelling:

- Pronunciation can change without spelling changing
e.g. English *name* used to be pronounced [na:mə] but spelling did not change.
- Spelling can change without pronunciation changing
Turkish switched it's whole alphabet in 1928 without changing pronunciation
Russian modified it's spelling in 1917 without changing the pronunciation

10 Comparative reconstruction

How do we know about supposed mother languages if there are usually no speakers of these languages and frequently no texts?

We **reconstruct** vanished languages by **comparing** their descendant languages.