

Current issues in historical linguistics

Increased interest lately

- media attention
 - long-range relationships
 - evolution of language
 - decipherment of ancient writing systems
- conferences
 - grammaticalization
 - language contact, etc.
- numerous books, including new textbooks

Progress on traditional themes

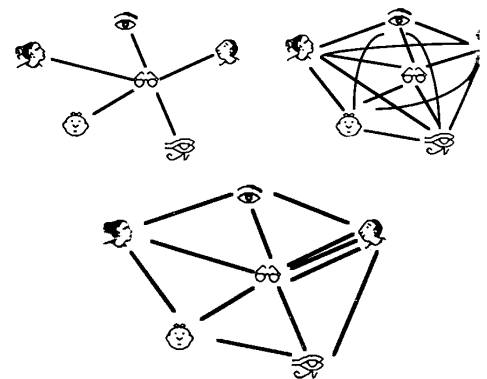
- history of languages and language families
 - Austronesian, Semitic, Uralic, Native American
- Classification of African and southeast Asian
- Corpus linguistic research
 - especially English

Language contact

- More attention lately
- Significant outside Europe
- Linguistic area (Sprachbund)
 - attempts at definition
 - what happened, how, when, why?

How and why sounds change

- is it basically regular?
 - mechanically as Neogrammarians said?
 - by lexical diffusion?
 - through weak network ties?
 - internal factors vs. social factors?



Labov's vowel shift principles

- "in chain shifts, short vowels fall"
 - do they always?
- "peripheral vowels are raised and non-peripheral vowels are lowered"
 - what is "peripheral"?

Mergers

- mergers are preferred?
- mergers are avoided?

High frequency words affected first?

- t/d-deletion
 - seems stable but affects high-frequency words more

Pathways of semantic change?

Morphosyntactic change

- 3 mechanisms
 - reanalysis
 - extension
 - borrowing
- how and why do syntactic changes take place?
- can we reconstruct syntax?

Grammaticalization

- explained by syntax?
- Is "de-grammaticalization" possible?

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Teleology

- does change travel towards a goal?

Distant genetic relationships

- remote kinship?
- “Amerind”?
- macrofamilies?
- “Altaic”?
- “Nostratic”?
- “proto-World”?

Beyond the comparative method

- Nichols “spread” vs. “accretion” zones

Punctuated equilibrium?

- Dixon’s argument
 - equilibrium in groups living in harmony
 - change in “punctuated” periods

Prehistory

- diversification and spread
 - agriculture crucial?
 - large and small families together?

Sociolinguistics

- apparent time proofs
- in-groups?
- social networks?