



An Introduction to Historical Linguistics

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All languages change, just as other aspects of human society are constantly changing. This book is an introduction to the concepts and techniques of diachronic linguistics--the study of language change over time. It covers all the major areas of historical linguistics, presenting concepts in a clear and concise way. While examples are given from a wide range of languages, most major concepts and techniques are illustrated by material drawn from the languages of Australia and the Pacific. The needs of undergraduate students of linguistics have been kept firmly in mind, but the book will also be of interest to the general reader seeking to understand language and language change. This third edition includes a number of rewritten and supplemented sections and new material on grammaticalization, ergativity and accusativity, language diversification, palaeolinguistics, and morphological evolution.

An Introduction to Historical Linguistics Details

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From Reader Review An Introduction to Historical Linguistics for online ebook

Ahmed J says

I have read the two editions for the same textbook (i.e., 3rd and 4th). However, I will review the fourth edition since it has covered many areas in comparison with the third edition. I should note that Terry Crowley is the only author of the third edition, while both Terry Crowley and Clair Bowerman are the authors of the fourth edition.

Contents:

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter introduces the reader to the nature of linguistic relationships, and to the ideas of *langue* and *parole* by Ferdinand de Saussure. The notions of diachrony and synchrony are covered. The concept of protolanguage, family tree, and different reasons for language change including anatomy, ethnicity, climate, geography, substratum, local identification, functional need, simplification, and structural pressure are covered. Finally, a brief sketch of attitudes towards language change is covered.

Chapter 2: Types of Sound Change

Crowley and Bowerman turn now to different phonological processes relative to sound change. They mainly covered lenition, fortition, sound loss, sound addition, metathesis, fusion, fission, breaking, assimilation, dissimilation, and tone changes.

Chapter 3: Expressing Sound Changes

The third chapter starts with the difference between conditioned change and unconditioned change. Then, relevant mathematical rules are introduced to illustrate sound changes. Ordering of rules, which demonstrates the order of sound changes, is covered. These rules enable readers to translate sound changes and their chronological order.

Chapter 4: Phonetic and Phonemic Change

The authors introduce briefly the notions of phonetic and phonemic change in addition to examples. This chapter illustrates the interaction between these two types of sound change.

Chapter 5: The Comparative Method (1): Procedures

Comparative method is the widely used tool amongst historical linguists. Comparative method is highly trusted and practiced despite the spread of new methods that involve computer programming. Sound correspondences and their role in reconstruction are covered. The technique of comparative method is applied to Proto-Polynesian, as an example. Afterwards, a succinct description of the concept of reconstruction of conditioned sound change is provided. The reality of the notion of protolanguage is discussed very briefly at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 6: Determining Relatedness

This chapter turns to the process of finding families and subgrouping. Shared innovation is a sign of

language change, whereas shared retention is not. The idea of long-distance protolanguages applies through two processes: comparing protolanguages and mass comparison. Since the concept of protolanguages is an abstract and not real (i.e., no one can assuredly claim that this protolanguage was spoken one day), comparing protolanguages will not yield reliable results. So far as mass comparison is concerned, since it is based on relaxation of strict comparison, it will not have accurate results due to the impossibility of distinguishing cognates.

Chapter 7: Internal Reconstruction

Synchronic alternations are the basic resource for reconstructing a prelanguage. The authors provide examples with respect to Indo-European laryngeals. This method is limited to a few cases. For instance, when a comparative method cannot be applied because the language has no relatives; when the comparative method cannot reveal sufficient information because the language is very distantly related to the protolanguage; when the information needed involves changes occurred between the reconstructed language and the protolanguage. The authors supply instructions in terms of applying the internal reconstruction.

Chapter 8: Computational and Statistical Methods

The distinction between innovation-based and distance-based methods is very briefly covered. The first one deals with the sound correspondences, while the latter deals with the relationship between daughter languages. The concept of lexicostatistics is included along with concepts such as core vocabulary and subgrouping. Also, the influence of biology on historical linguistics is clear through terminology borrowing and methodologically similar application.

Chapter 9: Comparative Method (2): History and Challenges

The authors introduce a very brief historical sketch of the emergence of the comparative method. There are challenges in terms of application. For instance, it is not easy to eliminate borrowing words. Also, unconditioned sound change is hard to assign its original correspondence. The Neogrammarian view, which claims that sound change is regular and systematic, is included. The difference between the wave model and lexical diffusion is covered.

Chapter 10: Morphological Change

This chapter introduces changes relevant to the morphological structure. There are some significant aspects that involve morphological change; for instance, allomorphic change, boundary shifts, and doubling and reinforcement. Additionally, morphological change applies to the order of morphemes. Analogy is another morphological process that leads to change –it has three types: analogical change by meaning, analogical change by form, and analogical extension and leveling. Techniques and tools for morphological reconstruction are covered.

Chapter 11: Semantic and Lexical Change

Semantic categories such as amelioration, pejoration, broadening, narrowing, bifurcation, and shift are covered. Some semantic processes influence the notion of unidirectionality –such processes include metaphor, euphemism, hyperbole, interference, folk etymology, and hypercorrection. This chapter includes the fact that lexical change involves borrowing, internal lexical innovation, and shortening. There must be some consequences regarding the processes of borrowing and lexical change that are considered as obstacles for comparative method. It is more difficult to reconstruct a language that has a number of borrowing words. The authors draw a line between the two concepts: borrowing and copying. The first one implies that the word may return back to its original language which is not true, while the second does not.

Chapter 12: Syntactic Change

There are a number of syntactic change processes. The typological differences as well as the cycle of change are included. Typological change involves mainly word order, whereas grammatical change involves grammatical categories. The direction of grammatical change is expected to occur in one direction (i.e., grammaticalization) –from lexical morphemes into grammatical morphemes. This chapter covers the mechanisms of syntactic change. That is, it involves the processes of reanalysis, analogy, extension, diffusion, and borrowing.

Chapter 13: Observing Language Change

Although there is a general consensus among historical linguists that language change cannot be observed, recent sociolinguistic studies show that it can be noticed. There are some difficulties with respect to determining the kind of change; for instance, it is hard to consider some stylistic variations as change in progress. Also, class-based variation and variation in small communities are variables and based on social and economic circumstances.

Chapter 14: Language Contact

Language contact is one of the fundamental tenets that lead to language change and/or loss. This chapter deals with the concept of language genesis including pidgins and creoles. They provide a definition that may run counter to the majority of definitions. That is, they maintain the existence of a creole language without any prior existence of a pidgin language. Tok Pisin is provided in the case study, for example. So far as mixed languages are concerned, they borrow the structure from one language and the vocabulary from another.

Chapter 15: Cultural Reconstruction

The concept of cultural reconstruction is part of historical linguistics as long as words are involved. Other scientific fields may lend hand to historical linguistics, such as geology, archeology, and anthropology. The method of comparative culture is applied in this domain. A few examples from different cultures are covered. On the basis of cultural reconstruction, we can determine the homeland of people according to the age-area hypothesis. The concepts paleolinguistics and language origins are exclusively included in this edition. Methods of cultural reconstruction are covered.

Evaluation

This book is intended as an introduction to the central tenets of historical linguistics. A number of methods and theories are included. I have found this book to be a very good introduction to historical linguistics. However, I would not recommend this book for any one who lacks a good background in historical linguistics since it has many typos, which interfere with understanding the text. Moreover, the exercises have typos that make them impossible to solve unless you can make a good guess and solve the typo first. The brevity of sections does not contribute to the comprehension of the text. There should be another text available to guide the reader through an accurate understanding. The style of this book is similar to “Historical Linguistics: An Introduction” by Lyle Campbell. In fact, the latter has many examples and detailed explanation even though it does not address many areas covered by Crowley and Bowerman. Therefore, I do not recommend this book, on its own, as a sufficient source in historical linguistics.

Jon Gauthier says

Reading notes

3.5 stars—rounding up. This was an enjoyable primer on historical linguistics. It presumes no more than a basic knowledge of morphology and phonology. Concepts covered include phonological, phonetic, grammatical, semantic and lexical change, the comparative method, the family tree model, the wave model, lexicostatistics / glottochronology, language contact, language death, and relevant modern controversies in historical linguistics. Each chapter features extensive examples for each concept detailed.

The author seems to favor Australian and Oceanic (esp. Polynesian) languages, though this isn't necessarily a detriment, as these languages often show relatively simple phonological / grammatical / lexical / etc. change.

I was disappointed with some of the later chapters, which featured fewer examples and felt a bit hand-wavy at times.

Jigsaw says

This is a textbook that doesn't read like one, which is a good thing. It's still not really reading for laypeople (unless you've already got some background knowledge on the subject), but it's much more well-written than most textbooks. My only problem with it was that I wish it had included some more Indo-European data; I know Indo-European languages have been studied to death, but since descendants of PIE are spoken by readers of this book, examples are sometimes easier to connect with, since they're already familiar with cultural, geographical and linguistic features relating to it, as opposed to the Austronesian languages focused on in the book.

Sarah Ext says

The book that has completely changed my life/ career. Because of spending the summer of 2007 reading it over & over again, I fell in love with linguistics.. & I am now a PhD candidate in applied linguistics & about to defend my thesis !

Thomas says

While I haven't been able to read this, yet, I had to share an interesting sight (the link takes you to a Google Maps Streetview) I noticed while out and about earlier today. This is on the side of a building near Portland State University -- I suspect part of the building might have once been the campus bookstore.

Rima Muryantina says

I don't think I'm good enough at historical linguistics. But this book is really good. It's really easy to understand, I think, even for those who has no linguistic background. The explanation is really clear, and the

writer (either Crowley or Bower) seemed to be 'a great story teller of linguistics' who can make people understand easily anything he/she said (even though this is not a 'light topic', even in the area of linguistics). The exercises are good. My favourite chapter is the one about lexicostatistics. I really wish they have more discussions on that approach (not that I dislike the comparative method, though).
