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Historical Linguistics Assignment 2
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Part 1

A. What are the methodological differences and similarities in the Historical Comparative Reconstruction and Internal Reconstruction?

⇒ Historical linguistics uses many methodologies to reconstruct earlier languages, amongst them are comparative methods and internal reconstruction. While both approaches to reconstructing have the same goal of getting to see diachronic language development, they differ from each other in their data sources, procedures and they also have different limitations. The comparative method works across multiple related languages, comparing cognates to reconstruct their common ancestor language. This method relies on systematic sound correspondences between languages within a family. This approach yields reconstructions designated with the prefix “proto-” like Proto-Indo-European, Proto-Germanic and more. Internal reconstruction on the other hand is like the comparative method but applied to a single language. This method examines alterations within a single language to infer its earlier stages. Instead of comparing cognates across languages, it compares allomorphic variants within paradigms, derivations and stylistic variants. The reconstructions from internal reconstruction typically bear the prefix “pre-” like Pre-English.

The methodological procedures are different from each other. In Comparative Method one identifies cognates across related languages, establishes systematic sound correspondences, reconstructs proto-forms that explain the attested affix forms, apply knowledge of sound change directionality to evaluate reconstruction and verify results through internal consistency checking. Whereas, Internal reconstruction first identifies alternation, that is, forms which have more than one different allomorph in paradigms, derivations, different styles and so on, then postulates a single, non-alternating original form, then again postulates

the changes which are usually conditioned sound changes which must have taken place to produce the alternating forms and lastly checks the results to make certain that the changes we postulated do not imply changes for other forms that they do not in fact undergo.

The similarities in both methods are that they both focus on reconstructing earlier language states which relies on the principle that languages change systematically over time. Both the methods heavily rely on principles of sound change directionality, employing knowledge about which changes are more natural or likely. Both methods often require establishing the sequence in which multiple changes occurred. Campbell (1998) mentions that when more than one change is involved in the reconstruction, sometimes they can each affect a form and in such situations it may be necessary to figure out which change or changes took place earlier and which later. Both methods use verification steps to ensure that the proposed reconstructions do not imply impossible outcomes for the other forms.

The differences seen in both of them is that the comparative method works with data from multiple related languages whereas internal reconstruction works exclusively with data from a single language. Comparative methods can typically reach further back in time but internal reconstruction is generally more limited in temporal depth, recovering only the immediately preceding stage. Comparative methods can reconstruct extensive vocabulary and grammar whereas internal reconstruction is far more limited to reconstructing elements that show alterations. Comparative methods often provide more results due to multiple independent lines of evidence, whereas internal reconstructions may show results that are tentative as they rely on evidence within a single system. The example I want to give is from the book *An introduction : Historical Linguistics by Lyle Campbell (1998)*. In Tojolabal (Mayan), the morpheme for “I” appears as h-before consonants and k-before vowels.

h-man = I buy (man = to buy)

h-lap = I dress" (lap = to dress)

k-il = I see (il = to see)

k-u? = I drink (u? = to drink)

So, through internal reconstruction we can reconstruct Pre-Tojolabal *k- as the original form, with a change of *k -> h- before consonants.

And as for comparative methods, I did like to use the one which was also given in *Wanderers, merchants and Kings book by Peggy Mohan*. In her book there was a comparison between cognates for “father” across Indo-European languages.

1. Latin: pater
2. Sanskrit: pitár
3. English: father
4. Greek: patér

From this , I also wanted to mention the limitations that we can see. Comparative methods may require related languages for comparison and internal reconstruction may be limited by alterations. Comparative methods may encounter difficulties with extensive borrowing, internal reconstruction cannot reconstruct features that were lost without leaving alterations. Comparative sound changes may obscure earlier patterns. But Campbell (1998) has stated that when sounds have completely merged, a subsequent change, say some generations later will not be able to restore the original distinctions as seen for internal reconstructions.

B. How does your response relate to the methods used in determining the units of phonology (phoneme and allophones) and units of morphology (morphemes and allomorphs) in a synchronic description in a language?

⇒ While historical reconstruction uncovers earlier language stages, synchronic analysis on the other hand aims to describe the current structure of a language. Yet these approaches are deeply interconnected in how they identify and analyse phonological and morphological units. Synchronic description is studying a language at a specific point in time without considering historical changes. There are two primary units that linguists identify: one is phoneme and the allophones. In phonemes we can see the contrastive, meaning distinguishing sound units and as for allophones we can see the variant realizations of phonemes in complementary distribution. So, the process of determining these units typically involves finding minimal pairs to establish contrast between sounds, identifying complementary distribution patterns, formulating rules that predict allophonic variation and creating a systematic phonological inventory. The methods used for synchronic phonological analysis show similarities with

historical reconstruction approaches. Both disciplines search for patterns in sound distribution. Just as synchronic analysis examines environments where specific sounds occur, historical reconstruction examines environments where specific allomorphs appear. The concept is central to both fields. In synchronic analysis, allophones exist in complementary distribution. Similarly, in internal reconstruction, allomorphs often appear in complementary distribution, suggesting they derive from a single historical form. For example, in English velar nasals, when analyzing the alternation between [ŋ] and [ŋg] in words like "long" [lɒŋ] and "longer" [lɒŋgər], both synchronic and diachronic approaches must determine the underlying representation and its relationship to surface forms.

As for morphology, the synchronic analysis of morphological units shows morphemes that are minimal meaningful units and allomorphs which are variant forms of a morpheme occurring in different environments. The synchronic approach for this involves identifying meaningful segments through substitution and paradigmatic analysis, recognizing patterns in allomorphic distribution, accounting for morphophonemic alternations and establishing base forms and derivational relationships. As for historical reconstruction, the first step would be identifying alternation. Both approaches analyze the environments conditioning different realizations. Nahuatl's example, in Campbell (1998) book's is a good example which can be used for analysis. The Nahuatl example shows complementary distribution between *iksi* "foot" and "-ksi" foot (with prefixes). It can be examined synchronically to analyze as allomorphs of one morpheme with predictable distribution. And it can be examined diachronically reconstructed as *ksi with a subsequent epenthesis rule.

C. What is the role of variation (linguistics, social, regional) in determining mechanisms of language of change?

⇒ Language change is driven by variation which provides the raw material for evolutionary processes in language. There are many types of variations like linguistics, social, regional and so on which influence language change. When multiple pronunciations of the same sound exist within a speech community, it creates the conditions necessary for sound change. For example, the Great Vowel Shift in English (14th-16th Centuries) began with pronunciation variants that coexisted before one eventually became dominant. These variants provide options from which speakers unconsciously select. Grammatical structures that allow

alternative expressions create opportunities for grammaticalization and analogy. Like the development of the English future tense marker 'going to' which becomes 'gonna' which began as a variant way to express future actions alongside other constructions. The mechanisms enabled by linguistic variations are reanalysis when ambiguous structures allow for multiple interpretation, extension when the application of a rule to new contexts and analogy which is the regularization of forms based on patterns. Social variation with factors such as age, gender, class and ethnicity strongly influences the direction and rate of language change. Prestige variants often spread through a community via change from above, where speakers consciously adopt forms associated with higher social status. We have seen the instagram trend where the bridgerton series was going on and most people used to make reels on them to show elegance and status. Conversely, change from below occurs when non prestige variants spread unconsciously often led by working class speakers or particular social groups establishing identity markers. The apparent time hypothesis in sociolinguistics shows how generational differences in speech patterns reveal language changes in progress. Young speakers often lead innovative changes, which become established as these speakers age and new generations adopt them. Some mechanisms that are enabled by social variations are speech accommodation wherein adjusting one's speech to converge with or diverge from others, hypercorrection that is overuse of prestige forms in formal contexts and social diffusion that is spread of features through social networks. Regional variation creates distinctive dialect features that can develop into broader language changes. When speakers of different regional varieties interact, it triggers processes of accommodation, leveling and borrowing. Urban centres often serve as focal points where dialect features compete, with some being adopted across broader regions. Isolated communities tend to preserve features or develop unique innovations. Meanwhile, increased mobility and communication technology have accelerated dialect leveling in modern times, reducing regional differences. The mechanisms enabled by regional variations are borrowing which is adopting features from other dialects or languages, substrate influence which is effects of previously spoken languages on new ones.

D. What is the role of language contact in determining the relationship of languages and language change?

⇒ When speakers of different languages or varieties interact, the resulting linguistic exchanges create patterns of influence that operate at phonological, morphological, syntactical, lexical and pragmatic levels. The intensity and consequences of contact depends on several factors like duration and intensity of contact as for how longer and more intensive contact typically results in more profound linguistic changes. Then, there is social power relationship as asymmetrical power dynamics influence the direction and extent of linguistic borrowing, typological similarities like languages with similar structures may experience different contact effects than typologically distinct languages and speakers demographics where the number of speakers and their sociolinguistic characteristics affect contact outcomes. Language contact operates through several mechanisms like borrowing, convergence and more. Borrowing is the process of adoption of linguistic elements from one language into another. This typically begins with lexical borrowing like the English restaurant that we use is from French. It can extend to structural borrowing of phonological features, morphological patterns and syntactic constructions. Substrate influence occurs when speakers of one language shift to another language but retain features of their original language. This phenomenon is particularly evident in situations of language displacement or colonization. The influence of Celtic languages on British English shows a classic example, where certain grammatical constructions and phonological features of modern British English can be traced to Celtic substrate which influences the wholesale language shift that occurred. Convergence represents a more gradual process where languages in prolonged contact develop shared features over time, creating what linguists term as linguistic areas or sprachbund. The Balkan Sprachbund shows a process where Greek, Albanian, Romanian and South Slavic languages despite belonging to different branches of the Indo-European family share numerous grammatical features due to centuries of cultural and linguistic interaction. These shared features include postponed definite articles, merger of dative and genitive cases, and the replacement of infinitive constructions with finite subordinate clauses. Code switching involves the alternation between languages within a conversation or even within a single sentence among bilingual speakers. This practice, once considered haphazard, has been shown to follow systematic patterns governed by the grammatical constraints of both languages involved. Over time, frequent code-switching patterns can become the norm and affect the structure of one or both languages, especially in communities where many people speak more than one language and this continues from one generation to the next. Language contact makes it hard to figure out how languages are related to each other. It makes it hard to

tell if features of a language come from its genes or if they were borrowed from another language. This makes it hard to tell the difference between similarities that are due to genetics and those that are due to contact. This is a key issue in historical linguistics. While surface-level similarities may be the result of shared ancestors or contact, the comparative method tries to overcome this challenge by identifying systematic correspondences, or links, rather than individual similarities to establish genetic relationships. These systematic patterns, especially in important words and basic grammar, often provide more reliable evidence of shared ancestry than features that are more easily borrowed. The idea that language relationships can be affected by geography greatly challenges the traditional family tree model of language relationships. This means that we need to consider more complex ideas about how languages are passed down, both through families and through contact between different languages. Modern classifications are starting to include both of these to provide a better understanding of language relationships. In some cases, contact between different languages can lead to the creation of entirely new languages that don't fit neatly into existing categories. Creole languages are created when pidgins are simplified into contact languages used for limited communication between groups without a common language that become native languages for a generation of speakers. This process leads to the expansion and regularization of the language's structure. Computational approaches have completely changed the study of language contact. These approaches allow linguists to create models of contact-induced change and test hypotheses about historical contact scenarios. These methods include statistical analysis of how words are borrowed and agent-based models that simulate how features spread through groups of speakers. These models help identify the conditions under which different outcomes are likely to emerge. These methods are especially useful for studying historical contact situations where direct observation is not possible.

The English language is a great example of how contact can affect different levels and time periods. The Germanic core of the English language was enriched by Norse influence during Viking settlements, as seen in words like "they," "their," and "them." Norman French influenced the language after the 1066 conquest, adding vocabulary related to government, law, and cuisine. Latin and Greek scholarly influences contributed scientific and technical terminology, and many languages encountered during colonial expansion also influenced the English language. This layered history of contact has created a language whose vocabulary is

mostly non-Germanic despite its Germanic grammatical core. This shows how contact can fundamentally change a language while keeping its basic typological character intact.

Part 2

E. In the light of your response to A to D, discuss the limitations of notions of language family, linguistic area in building our understanding of linguistic relationships in a time space continuum.

⇒ The study of linguistic relationships has long been dominated by two fundamental organizational concepts : language families and linguistic areas. While these have proven invaluable in helping scholars map the complex terrain of language development and interaction. The idea of linguistic areas is closely related to geography, but there are important limits to this connection. Language contact is not only due to geography, but also has a lot to do with society, politics, and history. There are several things including how long and strong the contact is, the social power relationships between people, the fact that sometimes one person or group has more power than another, how similar or different the languages are, and the age and background of the people involved. These social factors are evident in how contact situations frequently trigger the formation of language ideologies that shape attitudes toward language mixing and purity. These ideologies may lead to efforts to standardize language, or they may lead to movements that resist foreign influence. These social factors make it hard to use just geography or genetics to classify languages. Traditional models can't explain all the different factors that play into how languages mix and change. One of the most significant limitations is the difficulty in distinguishing between genetic inheritance and similarities caused by contact. Language contact makes it hard to figure out how languages are related to each other. It makes it hard to tell if features of a language come from its genes or if they were borrowed from another language.

The comparative method tries to overcome this challenge by identifying systematic correspondences, or links, rather than isolated similarities to establish genetic relationships. But this approach becomes more difficult when dealing with languages that have experienced a lot of contact.

This challenge is especially clear when looking at Sprachbünde, which are groups of related languages that have stayed in contact for a long time. One example is the Balkan Sprachbund, where languages like Greek, Albanian, Romanian, and South Slavic share many grammar features, even though they are from different parts of the Indo-European family. This is because they have been in contact for centuries. The ways that linguists use to study how languages are related have problems. The comparative method and internal reconstruction have problems when dealing with extensive language contact. One approach, called internal reconstruction, can only show changes in language. This method may have results that are only "tentative" because it relies on evidence from just one language. The comparative method can go back further in time, but it may have trouble with extensive borrowing.

These methodological limitations become particularly evident when trying to distinguish between features that are inherited and features that are borrowed in situations of intensive language contact. This makes it hard to know how to classify and rebuild, which traditional models don't always take into account.

Another problem with the ideas of language family and linguistic area is that they treat language change as a unidirectional process. This approach shows how languages change over time, but it often ignores how languages can also converge, meaning how they can come together. In South Asia, for example, the Indian linguistic area includes languages from many different families, such as Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman, and Munda. Despite their distinct origins, these languages have developed shared features due to prolonged interactions with culture, society, and politics. For example, they share features like verb-final word order and the use of compound verbs. If we only look at how languages are genetically related, we'll miss out on understanding how they've innovated and depend on each other in specific ways.

Also, linguistic areas are always changing. They change as communities move, trade, and make new social connections. For example, the Altaic Sprachbund, which includes languages like Turkish, Mongolic, and Tungusic, has been influenced by Turkic expansion, the Mongol Empire, and various waves of contact throughout Central Asia. The idea of a linguistic area becomes problematic when languages gradually change or move toward specific linguistic features depending on changing social and political situations. This means that models that

focus purely on linguistic areas may not capture how languages interact with each other over time.

Also, the way languages are compared based on shared features can't explain how languages change over time if they've borrowed a lot from each other. One example of this is how Japanese and Chinese borrow words and structures from each other. Although Japanese and Chinese are genetically unrelated, centuries of cultural exchange have resulted in a significant amount of Chinese-derived vocabulary and even structural influences on grammar.

The ideas of language family and linguistic area are limited because they don't fully capture the complex, dynamic, and multidimensional nature of linguistic relationships. We can see this when we look at how languages are formed, how they change over time, and how they interact with each other. Languages often change in both inheritance and diffusion, which are processes where languages are influenced by other languages in their development.

Traditional classification models oversimplify linguistic relationships, struggle to distinguish genetic from contact-induced similarities, represent dynamic processes statically, overlook the social dimensions of contact, and face methodological challenges in establishing relationships.

To better understand how languages change over time and space, we need new ways to study them. These new ways should include looking at how languages are passed down through generations, how they mix with other languages, and how they change over time.

As more and more is learned about how languages interact, using ideas from the study of society, the study of computers and languages in the study of languages and society, and the study of how languages interact and change, we may develop more advanced models to capture the reality that languages change as they interact. These new models will recognize that languages do not exist on their own. They exist as parts of networks of relationships that are shaped by inheritance and ongoing contact.

Creolization and mixed languages make it hard to figure out where languages come from. Creoles, like Haitian Creole, Tok Pisin, and Papiamentu, are languages that came from mixing European languages with indigenous or African languages. While they are often grouped

based on the languages that influenced them, for example, French or English, their grammars often differ significantly depending on the influence of the languages that came before them and unique innovations. The idea of language families becomes difficult to apply when looking at mixed languages like Michif, which combines Cree (a language with many different sounds) and French (an Indo-European language). Similarities between languages challenge the idea that language areas are just confined to geography.

Another example of this is the spread of English as a global language. English has influenced many languages around the world, and this has led to new types of English, like Singlish (Singaporean English) and Indian English. These different forms of English mix with local languages and cultures, creating new types of English that aren't easily put into the categories used for traditional language families or areas.

In conclusion, traditional language families and linguistic regions offer important insights. But they don't fully explain the difficult changes in languages. To understand how languages change over time and interact with each other, we need new approaches that combine ideas from contact linguistics, sociolinguistics, computational modeling, and interdisciplinary research.

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