Historical Linguistics in High School: The Columbus Experience

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In keeping with the theme of the Workshop on "Historical Linguistics at school: An ever-pressing need?", and with regard to the important role that historical linguistics can play in (i) introducing linguistics into high school curricula, (ii) helping to develop the next generation of linguists, and (iii) encouraging greater understanding about language within the population at large, we discuss here two initiatives we have participated in locally in which historical linguistics has been a successful part of presenting linguistics in general to high school students.

The first initiative is the Summer Linguistic Institute for Youth Scholars (SLIYS), now in its tenth year, a summer-camp-like experience for high school students with a stated interest in language and linguistics. The second, and more recent, initiative involves the establishment of a linguistics course and the creation of a linguistics club in a local public high school due to considerable effort on our part.

In both of these initiatives, the goal is to develop students' interest in linguistics more generally. Importantly, we have found that historical linguistics and a consideration of language change can figure prominently in achieving this goal. Historical linguistics is fun for the puzzle-hearted, and in our experience, students often find reconstruction and sound change problems to be entertaining, falling somewhere between a scavenger hunt and a crossword puzzle. Moreover, discussion of the following historically oriented topics and the various lessons, exercises, and the like associated with these topics also have proven useful:

• dialect differences (i.e., as a reflection of "shallow" linguistic history)
• variation within and across speech communities (as indicating incipient change)
• etymology of words and phrases (and philology and textual history)
• "deep" history (i.e., genetic/genealogical relationships, language families).

Moreover, these topics and associated data allow students to tap into their own covert knowledge about language, e.g. their awareness of suppletive forms (e.g. *go*/*went*), of irregularities (e.g. *mouse*/*mice*), spelling oddities (e.g. the <gh> in *night*/*light*/*right*), etc., and to see that all of these synchronic curiosities have principled historical explanations.

While our focus to date has been on the development of these topics with data from English, as the common language all the students know and have access to — so that "deep" history is presented with particular attention to Germanic and Indo-European — the material presented could in principle be based on any common language known to the students.

To judge from comments from the students over the years, and evaluations they have provided, it is clear that historical linguistics and the study of language change grab the students' attention and have offered them an important high-interest "gateway" to the more general scientific study of language.

We close by offering practical suggestions for the integration of historical linguistics into curricula for young scholars. For instance, additional topics such as computational simulation of language change or the question of whether there could be change in constructed languages or the role of social media in language change offer entrance ramps for students into linguistics that speak to aspects of their lives and interests.