Ling 150A: Historical Linguistics and Language Change  
Fall 2015

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TA office hours: TBD

Course time and location: MWTh 12:00 - 12:50 (Block E), Volen 119

1 Description

This course provides students with an introduction to the study of historical linguistics and language change, using data from ancient and modern languages in a variety of language families.

We will begin by studying the primary ways in which languages change, including changes that affect the pronunciation of words (sound change), the forms of words (borrowing, analogy, morphological change), the meaning of words (semantic change), and how words are arranged within phrases (syntactic change).

Having developed this foundation, we will then turn to linguistic reconstruction. Using the Comparative Method and our understanding of language change developed in the first part of the course, we will study how historical linguists reconstruct the earlier states of languages and unattested parent languages. Special attention will be paid to the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European (the parent of the Indo-European languages) and Proto-Semitic (the parent of the Semitic languages) and recent computational approaches to reconstruction and determining subgroupings within language families.

Finally, we will turn our attention to the explanation of language change, examining the role of language acquisition, sociolinguistics, and language contact in the initiation and promulgation of changes. We will look at language changes currently in progress, including the effect of the Internet and "txtspeak" on English and other languages.

2 Learning goals

As a result of having taken this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and clearly articulate the patterns and generalizations present in sets of sound, word, phrase, sentence, and discourse data involving language change or variation in a given language or languages;
• Formulate reasonable next questions to ask, or identify the sort of additional examples that need to be gathered and examined, in order to fully discover the empirical generalizations present in such sets of data, or to choose between competing hypotheses about the facts;

• Formulate well-reasoned hypotheses and analyses of the facts present in a set of data relating to change in a language; demonstrate how well a given analysis would or would not work to fully capture the facts that it aims to explain; evaluate competing analyses as to which should be chosen as the best account available, in terms of both empirical adequacy and theoretical merits.

3 Prerequisites

Ling 100a (Introduction to Linguistics) or permission of instructor. Students engaged in the advanced study of a language with a strong interest in the historical development of the language are also welcome to take the course but may need to do some additional background readings from time to time.

4 Readings


Additional recommended and required readings will be made available on the course LATTE site from time to time.

5 LATTE

Please check the course LATTE site frequently. The course schedule, additional/supplemental readings, assignments, and other materials will be posted on the site as we progress through the semester.

6 Requirements and grading

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<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Homework assignments</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<td>Participation and attendance</td>
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<td>Quizzes and exams</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
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<td>Final exam</td>
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6.1 Assignments

There will be approximately 8 homework assignments during the semester. Assignments are due at the beginning of class and will be graded on a 10-point scale. The lowest score will be dropped.

Late homework will be accepted only until the graded assignment has been returned, provided that one point will be deducted for each day the assignment is late, up to a maximum deduction of 5 points. Please note that homework submitted on the date it is due but after the beginning of class will be deemed one day late.

Although I strongly encourage you to work on each of the assignments independently, unless I specify otherwise in the instructions to an assignment, if you find yourself having difficulty with the assignment
you may work on it with one other person, provided that (i) in your assignment you must identify the person that you worked with and (ii) each student must write up the assignment separately.

All homework must be typed and submitted in hard copy; due to the many issues that can occur with fonts, assignments may not be submitted by email. If you do not currently use an IPA font, you should check the font resources linked to the course LATEx page. You should feel free to use any IPA font that you prefer so long as it contains all of the characters and diacritics that you need. (I especially recommend the SIL Doulos Unicode font.)

6.2 Participation and attendance

Class attendance is required and participation in class is expected. While you will not be penalized for being quiet in class, I hope very much that you will ask questions and want to participate in class discussions.

You may miss up to three classes for any reason. Each additional class missed will result in a reduction of your final percentage grade for the course by 0.25%, up to a maximum of 10% lost.

6.3 Quizzes and exams

There will be two short quizzes and with a longer midterm quiz, which will count as two quizzes in the calculation of the quiz portion of the final grade; all of the quizzes together will comprise 30% of your final grade. Tentative dates for the quizzes are given in the course schedule on the following page. The final exam will take place at the date and time scheduled by the Registrar. I will provide more details on each as the dates approach.

7 Electronic devices

No electronic devices (including laptops, tablets, and cellphones) may be used in class without my prior permission. Please keep all cellphones put away (and turn them off completely if the thought of a new message is irresistible).

8 Disabilities

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

9 Academic integrity

You are expected to be familiar with, and to follow, the University’s policies on academic integrity. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures. All policies related to academic integrity apply to everything that you do in connection with the class, including, without limitation, all in-class and take-home projects, assignments, exams, and quizzes. Students may only collaborate on assignments with permission from the instructor; no other collaboration is permitted. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university.
10 Topics and general schedule

The topics that will be covered in the course and general schedule, along with the corresponding chapters in the textbook, are as follows (subject to minor change based on class progress and interests):

Week 1: Introduction to the course and historical linguistics

Weeks 2-8: Part I: Types of linguistic change

- Campbell ch. 2: Sound change
- Campbell ch. 3: Borrowing
- Campbell ch. 4: Analogical change
- Quiz (tentatively sched. for Wed., Oct. 7)
- Campbell ch. 10: Morphological change
- Campbell ch. 9: Semantic change
- Campbell ch. 11: Syntactic change
- Mid-term quiz (tentatively sched. for Mon., Oct. 26)

Weeks 9-11: Part II: Linguistic reconstruction

- Campbell ch. 5: The Comparative Method and linguistic reconstruction
- Campbell ch. 6: Linguistic classification
- Campbell ch. 8: Internal reconstruction
- Campbell ch. 14: Distant genetic relationship
- Campbell ch. 16: Linguistic prehistory
- Campbell ch. 17: Quantitative approaches to historical linguistics
- Quiz (tentatively sched. for Mon., Nov. 16)

Weeks 12-15: Part III: Explanation of language change, change in progress

- Campbell ch. 7: Models of linguistic change
- Thanksgiving recess Nov. 25-27

Final exam on date and time scheduled by Registrar (tentatively Thursday, Dec. 17)