LING 474.01: Historical Linguistics

Tully J. Thibeau
LING 474/574  HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS  SPRING 2020

Instructor Information:

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SOME LEARNING OUTCOMES

Define and identify language changes over time given the following strata ...

- In general, phonemic vs. non-phonemic (a.k.a., phonetic) sound changes
- Cultural vs. intimate (a.k.a., structural) borrowing of form from speech community A to speech community 1
- Types of semantic change
  - Broadening
  - Narrowing
  - Amelioration
  - Pejoration
- Analogical levelling of a morphological paradigm as per another paradigm
- Syntactic change as a progression, concealed by a reanalysis of open-class forms toward closed-class forms

Course Overview: Variation

As stated in one book, historical linguistics typically concerns language change over time (Bybee 2015:1) though the author refers to time as successive units of temporal magnitude as opposed to stages of development in individual learners. Stimulus for language changes is attributed by the author largely to cognitive mechanisms she considers to be responsible for intelligibility. Yet, as a central factor of historical linguistics, it seems inexact to identify cognition as either the reason why languages change or the means how languages change. Also, the matter is undetermined whether the role of cognition in perceiving and producing language is to be regarded either a system-internal or -external factor; most textbooks about historical linguistics include a chapter on internally- and externally-driven variation - Bybee’s textbook being no exception (her last chapter, 11, the initial point of the course).

- Antilla 1972, sections 9.1, 9.14 & 9.16
- Bybee 2015, sections 11.1.3, 11.1.4 & 11.2 intro
- Lehmann 1992, sections 1.1 & 1.9
Course Matter: System

To begin, let’s propose a **SYSTEM** as a set of principles and a principle as a way of proceeding (in this instance, using language intelligibly, generally perception/production of speech). By acknowledging language is a system, we accept that, like every system, it is observable to a point of being measurable and feasibly generalizable to a degree that observers may conclude the probability of rules (e.g., principles), once codified, constituting a grammar; furthermore, as a system, language affords its users predictability in forms of their speech. What makes language predictable (knowable beyond experience) is its grammar (it seems), but, under this construal, we encounter a mental grammar, not one described by a linguist. And the extent to which a grammar must be understood to be psychological is contentious.

- Bybee 2015, sections 11.1.1 & 11.4
- Bloomfield 1933, Chapter 1
- Hock & Joseph 1996, Chapter 10, sections 1, 2 & 6
- Sapir 1921, Chapter VII (Reading 17)

Course Issue: Mentalism

The present-day study of language is realized as both a cognitive and behavioral science, but, as a system, its principles may involve one facet (cognition, not directly observable) more than the other (behavior, directly observable); a **MENTALIST** or “mechanical” element (Lyons 1970) will be primary. Archetypically, approaching the mind-or-machine dispute concerns factors external to language (events outside the system, like trade and migration): When novelties are introduced to a culture by another, members of the former at times use a form for it, approximating the model articulated by those of the latter (Bloomfield 1933), or a behavior imitating a behavior; at other times, a loan-word is resisted, not in defiance, but as alien “material,” hence inaccessible to the borrower’s native system (Sapir 1921:195, a “psychological attitude” inhabiting the “unconscious mind”), or cognition seeking sense.

- Bloomfield 1933, Chapters 25 & 26
- Sapir 1929, Chapter IX
- Antilla 1972, sections 9.6, 9.7 & 9.9
- Bybee, Sections 8.5

Course Focus: Materialism

A professedly more uncomplicated study of language as a system views social conventions (not workings of the brain) as the focal point of abundant goings-on that, by school-age, are integrated as a consequence of “repeated stimulations,” begetting a kind of habit-formation (Bloomfield 1933:37-38, a **MATERIALIST** theory of mental activity, like operant conditioning). Forms and their various arrays are shared by large enough numbers of people for a linguist
studying them to reveal the systematic nature of their language relying on its material only, what is produced and perceived by firmly established custom of the group, which may vary. Variations in material differentiate languages, dialects as well as idiolects from one another if examined at a single interval of one unit of temporal magnitude (horizontally, Ellis 1994): Vertically, material variations exhibit an historical activity, indistinctly internal or external.

- Hockett 1958, Chapters 46 to 49
- Hall 1964, Chapters 52 to 53
- Bybee, Sections 9.2.2 & 9.2.3

Course Inquiry: Autonomy
In terms of form, language must have material existence, or physical reality (EXTERNAL), yet, for form to become intelligible, it must also possess a degree of mental reality (INTERNAL). However, regarding this mental reality, or operation, to what extent is language as a system AUTONOMOUS from cognition? In other words, system-internal factors (AN INTERNAL HISTORY) attributed to language-change might be considered independent of ordinary intelligibility, thus reducing cognition to a system-external factor (AN EXTERNAL HISTORY) akin to influences attributable to intergroup contact, readily manifested in phenomena related to borrowing. Languages indisputably exchange material from one another if they share physical realities, but, once again, in terms of form, their systems seemingly set limitations on internalization. One may attribute restrictions to the structure of form, or grammar, not intelligibility of it.

Grading

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<th>Undergraduates</th>
<th>Graduates</th>
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<td>Informal Assignments (8-10 @ 5 pts. each)</td>
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<td>Mid-term exam (1 @ 20-30 pts.)</td>
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Course Policies

**Student Conduct Code**: You are expected to adhere to the University of Montana Student Conduct Code which may be downloaded from:

**Plagiarism Warning**: Plagiarism is the representing of another’s work as one’s own. It is a particularly intolerable offense in the academic community and is strictly forbidden. Students who plagiarize may fail the course and may be remanded to Academic Court for possible suspension or expulsion. (From the Univ. Catalog: http://www.umt.edu/catalog/acad/.)
Course Accommodations Statement (DDS): If you are a student with a disability who will require reasonable program modification in this course, please meet with Disability Services for Students in Lommasson 154 for assistance in developing a plan to address program modifications. If you are already working with Disability Services arrange to meet with me during my office hours to discuss reasonable modifications that may be necessary. For more information, visit the Disability Services website at: http://life.umt.edu/dss/.

Course Policies

Late Policy
All activities, assignments or exams given to the instructor after its due-date are not guaranteed to be either graded (and entered into the grade record) or returned (i.e., students must keep track).

Attendance Policy
Perfect attendance is desired but not expected; excessive absences typically intersect adversely with late policy and affect final grades. Students who miss the first two class meetings must drop the course (see URL presented below):
(http://www.umt.edu/catalog/acad/acadpolicy/default.html, under attendance/absence).

Withdrawal Policy
To know more information about withdrawing from a course, see the URL below:
(http://www.umt.edu/withdrawal/AlternateOptions.aspx)

Academic Honesty Policy
All students must observe academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to academic penalty by the instructor of the course and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. As a student in this course and at this university, you must be familiar with the Student Conduct Code (see URL presented below):
(http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php)

Special Accommodation Policy
If you will need special accommodation in this course due to some learning challenge that has been verified by DSS, please see me very early in the semester (Week Three) so that we can arrive at some appropriate accommodation.

Technology Policy
You may, of course, take class notes on a laptop or iPad or the like. Aside from that, I expect that technology will not intrude during class time. Please consider turning phones to “vibrate” or a similar setting that will not disturb the class.

Do not plan to receive phone calls during the class period