Syllabi   Course Syllabi

Spring 2-1-2018

LING 574.01: Historical Linguistics

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LING 474/574   HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS   SPRING 2018

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SOME LEARNING OUTCOMES

- ability to define and identify diachronic sound changes, morphological and syntactic processes

- knowledge of early and more recent explanations of language change

- understanding of effects of language contact on the birth and death of languages.

- knowledge of role of language contact on reconstruction efforts

- ability to apply criterion of shared innovation to (sub-)group languages

- ability to apply method of internal reconstruction for prior stages of a language

- knowledge of relative virtues of different models of language change

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; an impetus of language change 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 language changes or the means how language changes. 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, and most textbooks on historical linguistics include a chapter on internally and externally motivated VARIATION, Bybee's textbook being no exception (the last chapter, 11, the starting point of the course).

- Bybee 2015, sections 11.1.3, 11.1.4 & 11.2 intro (see also Preface, 1.1 & 1.5)
- Lehmann 1992, sections 1.1 & 1.9
- Antilla 1972, sections 9.1, 9.14 & 9.16
- ~~Hock 1986, Chapter 14 introduction~~

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 (i.e., 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
- Sapir 1921, Chapter VII (Reading 17)
- Hock & Joseph 1996, Chapter 10, sections 1, 2 & 6

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. Archetypally, 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," from inaccessibility to a 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 process, 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, rendering cognition a system-external factor (an external history) resembling 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

Undergraduates		Graduates	
In-class Activities each)	(4 @ 2.5 points	In-class Activities each)	(4 @ 2.5 points
Mid-term exam	(1 @ 39 points)	Mid-term exam	(1 @ 39 points)
Final Exam	(1 @ 51 points)	Final Exam	(1 @ 45 points)
		Graduate Increment	(1 @ 6 points)

Course Policies

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