LNGT0101
Introduction to Linguistics

Lingu-ist-ic-s
[lɪŋ-gʷɪ-stɪks]
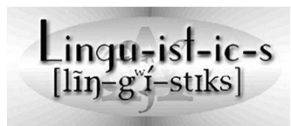
Lecture #21
Nov 28th, 2012

Announcements

- HW5 is due today by 5pm. This is the last homework, so you may celebrate this occasion by …

  working on the LAP [non- mean ☺].

Agenda

- Presentation on Myth 21: 'America is ruining the English language.'
- Unfinished business on language change: syntactic change and lexical diffusion.
- Introducing historical linguistics: *reconstruction*.

A pronunciation puzzle from Monday

please-pleasant
serene-serenity
sane-sanity
crime-criminal

A pronunciation puzzle

- The alternation is the result of the GVS taking place after the **Early Middle English Vowel Shortening** rule produced the second word in each pair.

Transition from last class

- Languages do change over time.
- Explaining why a language changes is a complex issue, but there are external and internal factors.
- Change targets all components of a language: the lexicon (lexical and semantic change) and the grammar (morphological, phonological, and syntactic change [the last to be discussed today]).
- Over time, changes can be so substantial that sparkers of a language would fail to understand earlier forms of that language (*Beowulf*!).

Syntactic change

Syntactic change: Word Order

- Word order in a language could change over time. For example, Old English (OE) had more variable word order than Modern English (ModE) does.
- So, we do find SVO order in simple transitive clauses:

  Hē geseah þone mann

  He saw   the   man

Syntactic change: Word Order

- When the clause began with an element such as þa (="then"), the verb would follow that element, therefore preceding the subject:

  þa   sende sē   cyning þone disc

  then sent   the king   the   dish

  "Then the king sent the dish."

Syntactic change: Word Order

- When the object was a pronoun, the order in OE was typically SOV:

  Hēo hine lærde

  She him saved

  "She saved him."

Syntactic change: Word Order

- The same SOV word order also prevailed in embedded clauses, even when the object was not a pronoun:

  þa   hē þone cyning sōhte,   hē bēotode

  when he the   king   visited, he boasted

  "When he visited the king, he boasted."

Syntactic change: Word Order

- As we noted earlier, case markings were lost during the Middle English (MidE) period, and, as you should expect, the SVO order became the unmarked word order in the language.
- The following table shows the change in word order frequency that took place around 1300 and 1400:

Syntactic change: Word Order

Year	1000	1200	1300	1400	1500
OV %	53	53	40	14	2
VO %	47	47	60	86	98

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Syntactic change: Negation

- Negation in OE was done by placing the negation marker *ne* before a verbal element:

  βæt he na   siββan geboren ne wurde

  that he never after   born   not would-be

  "that he should never be born after that"

- Notice word order and the use of double negatives.

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Syntactic change: Negation

- In Early Modern English, we find the following line from Shakespeare's *Othello*:

  "*He that filches from me my good name   robs me of that which* **not** *enriches him*."

- Late Modern English then introduced the use of 'do' in negation.

- The same 'do' also started to appear in questions:

  'What heard you him say else?'

  (from *Much Ado About Nothing*)

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Double comparatives and superlatives

- Examples:

  more gladder, more lower, moost royallest, moost shamefullest

- These were all ok in Middle English.

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Genitives

The Wife's Tale of Bath	(MidE)
The Wife of Bath's Tale	(ModE)
The man's hat from Boston	(MidE)
The man from Boston's hat	(ModE)

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So, why do some changes make it, and some don't?

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Spread of change through the language

- A linguistic change may manifest itself at first in a few words, and then gradually spreads through the vocabulary of the language. We call this *lexical diffusion*.

Lexical Diffusion

- A good example of lexical diffusion from English has to do with an ongoing change in the stress pattern of words such as *convert*, which can be either a noun or a verb.
- Originally, the stress fell on the second syllable of such words, regardless of their lexical category.
- In the second half of the 16th century, three words, *rebel*, *outlaw*, and *record*, came to be pronounced with the stress on the first syllable when used as nouns. And this stress shift has been "diffusing" ever since.

Diffusion of stress shift in English
(graph from O'Grady *et al* 2001)
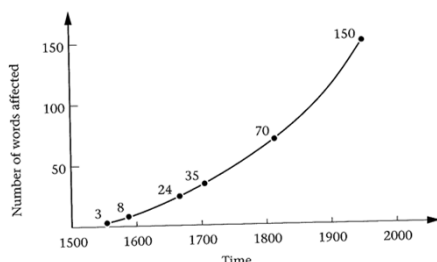

Figure 7.11 Diffusion of stress shift in English

Diffusion of stress shift in English

- Diffused: present   conduct   conflict
                   convert   permit   suspect

- Not diffused yet: report   mistake
                                support   finance

Non-gradual Diffusion: Cuban Spanish

- But not all phonological changes involve gradual diffusion. Some changes affect all instances of the sounds involved rather immediately.
- For example, the weakening in Cuban Spanish of [s] to [h] in syllable final-position applies to all instances where [s] occurs in that position:

    Spanish Spanish   Cuban Spanish
    [filismente]   [filihmente]   "happily"
    [estilo]   [ehtilo]   "type"

Spread of change through the population

- For a particular instance of language change to take place, the innovation must be accepted by the speech community.
- So, even though children acquiring English produce *goed*, the form was never accepted.
- Similarly, *throve* is not accepted as the past tense form of *thrive* (cf. *drive-drove*).

Spread of change through the population

- Social pressures often play an important role in the spread of a particular innovation.
- For example, when a change takes place in the speech of a high prestige group, it may gradually start spreading to other groups, and ultimately to the whole linguistic community.

Spread of change through the population

- The loss of postvocalic [r] along the east coast of the US is a famous example.
- Pronunciations such as [fa:] for [fa:r] originated in parts of England in the 17th and 18th centuries.
- It spread along the east coast of the US by the children of the New England gentry who studied at British schools, as well as the newly arrived immigrants who enjoyed high social status as colonial administrators and church officials.
- As a result, the innovation was widely imitated and spread along much of the east coast and the south.

Spread of change through the population

- But social pressures also limited the spread of that innovation.
- In Pennsylvania and other Midland states the most prestigious group of settles were Quakers from northern England, an area that retained postvocalic [r].
- Similarly, in Canada, the influence of Scottish and Irish settlers, whose dialect retained the [r], limited the spread of the innovation to those areas there were in contact with New England, e.g., Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.
- Interestingly, as we discussed before, "r-less" pronunciations have become stigmatized and we see an opposite trend for [r] restoration.

Is the word 'sustainable' sustainable?
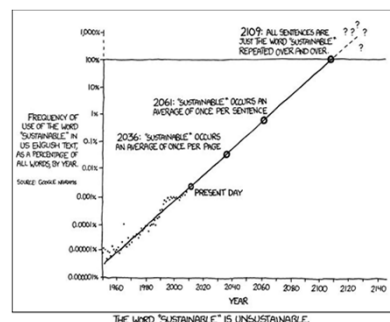
Summary of language change and transition to "reconstruction"

- To sum up, a language undergoes change in its lexicon as well as all components of grammar (phonology, morphology, and syntax).
- Over time, these changes might become considerable enough to the point where we become unable to tell if two historical varieties of the same language are actually related.
- Luckily, though, historical linguists developed ways to establish historical relations among languages. We discuss this next.

Historical linguistics

- The 19th century was the century for the study of historical (aka *diachronic*) linguistics.
- Herman Paul in 1891: "It has been objected that there is another view of language possible than the historical. I must contradict this."

Reconstruction and the comparative method

- Historical linguists, aka *comparativists*, were mainly concerned with "reconstructing" the properties of the parent language of a group of languages that are believed to be genetically related.
- *Reconstruction* was done by means of the *comparative method*, whereby earlier forms were determined via the comparison of later forms.
- The earlier forms are called *proto-forms*, and the earlier language is called a *proto-language*.

Cognates

- The forms compared were typically words that were believed to have developed from the same ancestral root. They are called *cognates*.
- Consider the following table of Germanic cognates:

Cognates

English	Dutch	German	Danish	Swedish
man	man	Mann	mand	man
foot	voet	Fuß	fod	fot
bring	brengen	bringen	bringe	bringa

- Compare the Arabic "non-cognates":

    [radʒul] 'man'
    [qadam['foot'
    [juħdˤir] 'bring'

The discovery of Proto-Indo-European

- In 1786, Sir William Jones, a British judge and scholar working in India, noted that Sanskrit bore to Greek and Latin "a stronger affinity … than could possibly have been produced by accident," and he suggested that the three languages had "sprung from a common source".
- This common source is what came to be known later as "**Proto-Indo-European**" (PIE), the parent language of most of the languages spoken today in Europe, Persia, and northern India.
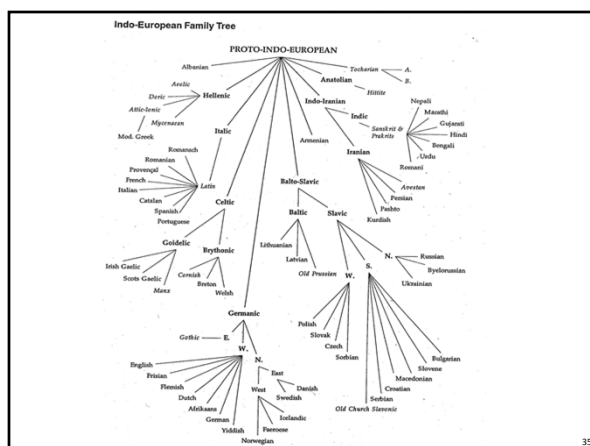
Next class agenda

- Reconstructions exercises.
- Pidgins and Creoles: Read the section in chapter 10 on Languages in contact, pp. 453-460
- Also, follow the link on the syllabus table online for a chapter on the topic.
- Also, have a look at David Crystal's Encyclopedia chapter on pidgins and creoles, pp. 334-339. It is on reserve.