



# Historical Linguistics

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# Overview

- Homeworks
- Review
- Historical Linguistics
- Language Change Processes

# Review

# Historical Linguistics

- Historical Linguistics studies how languages have changed over time.
  - This is known as the **diachronic** study of language.
- In sociolinguistics, we noted that at any given point in time, there is generational variation that arises from the transmission of a language from an older to a younger generation.
  - This naturally leads to that language changing over time.

# Historical Linguistics

- Hwaet we Gardena            in geardagum  
  þeodcyninga                þrym gefrunon  
  hu ða æþelingas            ellen fremedon
- Whan that Aprille with his shoores soote  
  the drought of March hath perced to the roote  
  and bathed every vein in swich liquor  
  of which vertu engendred is the flour

# Historical Linguistics

- In our previous units, we have mentioned that when two languages (or varieties) differ, we know that they differ in terms of their **mental grammar**
  - Lexicon
  - Inventory of phonemes
  - X-bar structure
  - Rules (phonological, morphological, syntactic, ...)
- When a language changes over time, these aspects must also be what is changing.

# Historical Linguistics

- Since the **mental grammar** is what is changing between the generations, we would expect the nature of the changes to be both **regular** and **systematic**
- A change can then affect:
  - A phoneme category
  - The X-bar template
  - Any kind of rule... and the result will be systematic
- **However**, there are some changes that may affect individual lexical items
  - These changes are more sporadic

# Language change mechanisms

- Languages change, then due to two influences:
  - **Child language acquisition**
    - The mental grammar that children have created based on language data that will differ from their parents
  - **Language variation**
    - If two language communities have an increasing amount of (social or geographical) distance between them over time, it is natural that their language will change in different ways.
- Granted, there are some changes that spread and persist, but others that do not. There is not a clear explanation for why this happens.



# Phonological Changes

- Phonological changes come about through phonetic/phonemic inventory differences between communities and generations over time.
- Some of these changes are due to processes that we are already familiar with!
  - Assimilation
  - Dissimilation
  - Epenthesis
  - Metathesis
  - Weakening and Deletion

# Phonological Changes

- Assimilation (Extremely common!)
  - Latin *septem* → Italian *sette* ‘seven’
  - Early Old English *slæpde* → Later Old English *slæpte* ‘slept’
- Dissimilation
  - Latin *anima* → Spanish *alma* ‘soul’
- Epenthesis
  - Early Old Eng *æmtig* → Late Old English *æmptig* ‘empty’
- Metathesis
  - Early Old Eng *wæps* → Late Old English *wæsp* ‘wasp’
- Deletion
- Vowel Reduction

# Phonological Changes

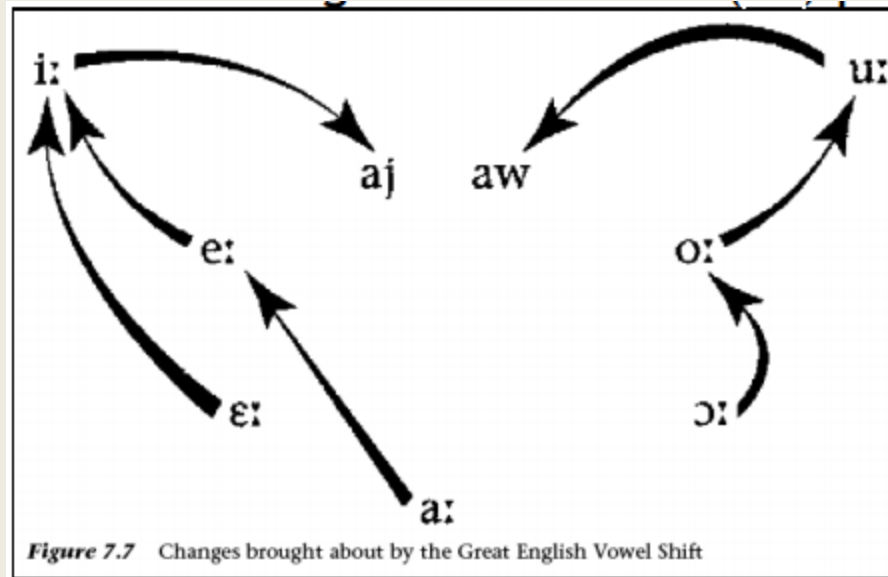
- There are some phonological changes that occur that are due to systematic changes throughout the phonetic/phonemic inventories:
  - Splits
  - Mergers
  - Shifts

# Phonological Changes

- Split:
  - One phoneme in an older form of a language corresponds to two different phonemes in a later form of the language.
    - Example: /n/ and /ŋ/ in English (*sing*)
- Merger:
  - Two (or more) phonemes in an older form of a language corresponds to one phoneme in a later form of the language
    - Example: *pin-pen* merger; *cot-caught* merger
- Shifts:
  - The number of phonemes does not change
    - Examples:
      - Great English Vowel Shift
      - Northern Cities Vowel Shift
      - New Zealand Vowel Shift
      - Grimm's Law (next class)

# Phonological Changes

- • The Great English Vowel Shift (CL, p 258)



- Does this help explain anything about the spelling conventions for English vowels?

# Morphological Changes

- Overgeneralization (of regular or irregular patterns)
  - Change by **analogy**
  
- Reanalysis
  - When a string of morphemes or words is reanalyzed as having a different structure

# Morphological Changes

- Analogy
- Latin before 400 BC
- honos 'honor'      labos 'labor'      (nom. sg.)
- honōsem      labōsem      (acc. sg.)
- Honōsis      labōsis      (gen. sg.)
  
- Regular sound change ([s] > [r] / vowel \_\_ vowel)
- honos      labos      (nom. sg.)
- honōrem      labōrem      (acc. sg.)
- honōris      labōris      (gen. sg.)
  
- What might **overgeneralization** do here?

# Morphological Changes

- Analogy
  - Latin after 200 BC
  - honor                      labor                      (nom. sg.)
  - honōrem                  labōrem                  (acc. sg.)
  - honōris                  labōris                  (gen. sg.)
- 
- The change from honōsem to honōrem (etc.) is explained by the regular sound change
  - Word-final [s] in general was not changed
  - But words like honos changed to honor by analogy with the rest of their paradigm



# Morphological Changes

- Reanalysis
- Old Finnish: [-m] acc. sg., [-n] gen. sg.  
(example from Campbell 1999)
- Original construction
  - a) näen miehe-m tule-va-m  
I.see man-ACC.SG come-PART-ACC.SG  
'I see the man who is coming'
  - b) näin venee-t purjehti-va-t  
I.saw boat-ACC.PL sail-PART-ACC.PL  
'I saw the boats that sail'

# Morphological Changes

- Reanalysis
- Sound change in Finnish: [m] > [n] / \_\_#
- New generation of learners: Does this construction use accusative, or genitive?
  - (a) näen miehe-n tule-va-n  
I.see man-ACC/GEN.SG come-PART-ACC/GEN.SG  
'I see the man who is coming'
- Here is what we find in the plural:
  - (b) näin vene-i-den purjehti-va-n  
I.saw boat-PL-GEN sail-PART-GEN  
'I saw the boats that sail'

# Syntactic Changes

- Word Order Changes

- English Inversion

- V to I to C

- You sing loudly.
      - Sing you loudly?
      - Can you sing loudly?

to

- Only I to C

- You sing loudly.
      - \*Sing you loudly?
      - Can you sing loudly?

# Semantic Changes

- Addition of Lexical items
  - Word Formation
  - Borrowing
- Loss of Lexical Items

# Semantic Changes

- Semantic change
  - Broadening
    - Meaning becomes more general
      - Bird 'small fowl' → 'any winged creature'
  - Narrowing
    - Meaning becomes more specific
      - Hound 'any dog' → 'a particular hunting breed'
  - Amelioration
    - Word meaning becomes more positive
      - Pretty 'tricky, sly, cunning' → 'attractive'
  - Pejoration
    - Word meaning becomes more negative
      - Silly 'happy, prosperous' → 'foolish'
  - Weakening
    - Word meaning becomes less intense
      - Wreak 'avenge, punish' → 'to cause, inflict'
  - Shift
    - Word meaning shifts to a new meaning
      - Immoral 'not customary' → 'unethical'
  - All referenced from *CL*, p. 272 - 273

# Homeworks

- Writing Assignment 9
- Homework Assignment
  - p. 291, Exercise 1, (a) – (g)
  - p. 294, Exercise 10
  - p. 294, Exercise 11

# Have a good day!

Many thanks to Jen Smith and Emily Moeng who contributed material to these slides.