Ling 115: Course Wrap-up

**Historical linguistics:** the study of how language changes over time

- sound change: phonemic and phonetic change
- morphological change: changes in affixing systems
- syntactic change: ergativity, constituent order
- lexical change: new words appear or replace old words
- semantic change: words acquire different meanings

…sometimes an earlier stage is not available to us, so we engage in reconstruction of it …

**Reconstruction**

The **comparative method** allows us to reconstruct that shared ancestor, and works as long as we have a principled account of how the descendent languages evolved from the ancestor language.

**Internal reconstruction** allows us to reconstruct an ancestor in the absence of related languages for comparison, but requires morphophonemic alternation

**Quantitative approaches** allow us to infer complex familial structures without reconstructing proto-forms

Reconstruction is complicated by several phenomena:

- Drift: certain traits *could* be shared among languages *just by chance*
- semantic changes make cognates difficult to detect
- lexical changes reduce the number of useable cognates for analysis
- conditioning in changes and irregular (word-by-word) reanalysis
- analogical changes
- linguistics areas may obscure the boundaries between language families
- **But we would not know about any of this without comparative and internal reconstruction!!!**
Subgrouping

Enough careful comparative analysis allows us to establish more complex relationships among 3 or more related languages.

Lexical changes can actually be used to the same end.

Observing language change

variation: multiple forms for same concept

lexical diffusion: progression of innovation differs across words of a language. same applies to variation.

Why do languages change?

Arbitrariness, variation, polysemy, simplification, and structural pressure
Causes and character of change

Arbitrariness: sound (form) and meaning (function) are arbitrarily linked

Variation: change requires variability in sound or meaning

- phonetic or phonemic change:
  - at some point, the old and new variants are both available:
  - same function, different form
- morpho-syntactic change:
  - at some point, the old and new structures are both available:
  - same function, different form
- reanalysis:
  - same function and form, but different abstract structure
- semantic change:
  - at some point, the old and new meanings are both available:
  - same form, different function

variability (and change) diffuses through a population and through the lexicon

Simplification

- Lenition, assimilation, fusion, deletion etc.; analogy
- but: no single ‘simplicity’ metric
- simplification along one dimension usually precipitates complexity somewhere else
  - chain shifts: first step may be ease-driven, but consequent steps are not
  - syncopation: deletion, but clusters result
  - some ‘lenited’ sounds can still be phonetically challenging

- agglutination → inflection:
  - fewer morphemes per word, but individual morphemes carry more functions
- inflection → isolation:
  - words are even shorter, but syntax becomes more complex
- isolation → agglutination:
  - phonological reduction, but morphology becomes complex
Structural pressure

Balancing phonemic inventories

But, gaps still exist

even so - some such “gaps” are principled

ŋ, p/g: languages with voicing contrasts

Language genesis and convergence

Languages in contact may precipitate new languages

pidgins and creoles: borrowed lexical items, but new phonology and morpho-syntax.
1. Indo-European (IE) languages:
   - **Greek**, splintered into about two dozen (known) dialects, in Greece, the Aegean islands, and areas further east (the Asia Minor seaboard, Pamphylia, Cyprus); clearly one language, very different from all others;
   - **Messapic**, in southeastern Italy, largely uninterpretable but with proper names exhibiting IE nominal morphology;
   - **Venetic**, in the lowlands of northeastern Italy;
   - **Italic**:
     - Latino-Faliscan, including
       - **Latin**, originally confined to Latium, and
       - **Faliscan**, spoken at Falerii on the upper Tiber (surrounded by Etruscan territory);
     - Sabellian, including
       - **South Picene**, east of the Appennines, and
       - a dialect continuum from **Oscan** in the south through the hill dialects east of Rome to **Umbrian**, as well as
       - a poorly attested dialect spoken in Campania before the Samnite invasion which might or might not have been part of the same dialect continuum;
     - **Sicel**, poorly attested from Sicily
   - the Celtic subfamily, represented by
     - **Hispano-Celtic** in northeastern Spain;
     - **Cisalpine Celtic** around the lakes of northern Italy, and
     - **Trans-alpine Celtic** in what is now France
2. “Minoan”: the language of the Linear A script, uninterpretable but clearly neither IE nor Semitic
3. “Eteocretan”: The language of some uninterpretable inscriptions in the Greek alphabet from eastern Crete
4. **Elymian**, known from some coins and tombs in Sicily
5. **Tyrrhenian** languages (Rix 1998):
   - **Etruscan**
     - **Lemnian**, Lemnos, north-eastern Aegean
     - possibly **Raetic**, northeastern Italy
6. A language inscribed on stone slabs in **Novilara** (east of San Marino)
7. **Iberian**, attested in inscriptions throughout southern and eastern Spain
8. **Tartessian**, known from 78 stelae of unknown function found in southwestern Iberia
9. The ancestor of **Basque**