

Class 10

The Comparative Method

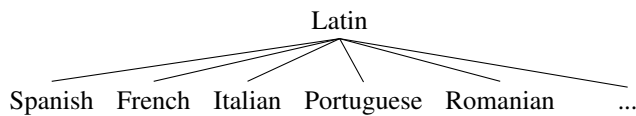
10/14/19

For this week: finish Fox Ch. 4, read as much of Campbell Ch. 5 as you can

1 Language change and language relatedness

- Thus far, we've been looking at changes from one stage of a language to a later stage of that same language.
 - Sometimes the two languages have basically the same name: *Old English vs. Modern English*
 - Sometimes they have completely different names: *Latin vs. Spanish*
 - Names are arbitrary conventions; this kind of naming difference is irrelevant.
- ★ What's important is that we can draw a straight line through history from an earlier stage of a language to a later stage.
- But in going forward in history from an earlier stage of a language, it's often the case that there's not just *one straight line* emanating out.

(1) The development of Latin



★ *How do we know this?*

◦ Historical records

- We have written evidence and contemporaneous reports that Latin was changing into these new varieties.
- In most cases, we don't have this kind of evidence...

◦ **Similarity**

- Even in the absence of direct historical evidence, we could observe that these languages look very “similar”.
- By similar, we mean that there are many words that have **both** *sound* and *meaning* in common.
- ★ Words that meet these criteria are (potentially) “**cognates**”.

- Vague, unquantified “similarity” between isolated words is not enough to *prove* that two languages are “**genetically related**”, i.e. derive from a common source.

★ To **prove** that languages are related, we must find **systematic, regular correspondences** between their potential cognates.

→ We do this through the application of the **comparative method**.

2 The Comparative Method

- When you *think* that two (or more) languages might be related, the way to go about proving it is through applying the comparative method.
- If the comparative method succeeds, that constitutes proof of genetic relatedness.
- The application of the comparative method also results in the identification of the “**proto-language**” — the common source of the related languages — and the systematic description of its properties.

2.1 Terminology

- Here I present some useful terminology for the comparative method Campbell (2013:109).

2.1.1 Terms for languages

- The most important concept is:

(2) **Proto-language:** the language reconstructed by the comparative method which represents the ancestral language from which the compared languages descend.

- When talking about related languages — whether in terms of the comparative method or otherwise — we use the analogy of a “family tree”.

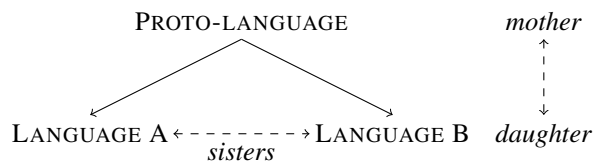
(3) **Mother language:** a direct ancestor language; in terms of the comparative method, this is equivalent to the proto-language.

(4) **Daughter languages:** the languages which descend from the same common ancestor (proto-language), as confirmed by the comparative method.

(5) **Sister language(s):** languages which are related to one another by virtue of having descended from the same common ancestor (proto-language), as confirmed by the comparative method.

- These can be summed up as follows:

(6) Terms for language relations



2.1.2 Important terms for applying the comparative method

(7) **Cognate:** a word which is related to a word in sister languages by reason of these forms having been inherited by these sister languages from a common word of the proto-language from which the sister languages descend.

(8) **Cognate set:** the set of words which are related to one another across the sister languages because they are inherited and descend from a single word of the proto-language.

(9) **Sound correspondence / Correspondence set:** a set of ‘cognate’ sounds; the sounds found in the related words of cognate sets which correspond from one related language to the next because they descend from a common ancestral sound. A sound correspondence will recur across multiple cognate sets.

(10) **Reflex:** the sound in a daughter language which is the descendant of a particular sound of the proto-language. (The original sound of the proto-language is said to be *reflected* by the sound which descends from it in a daughter language.)

2.2 Steps for applying the comparative method

- The following are the steps which you take to carry out the comparative method (Fox 1995:60).

- (11) **Step 1:** identify the cognate sets
Step 2: set up the sound correspondences
Step 3: establish the proto-phonemes
Step 4: assign phonetic values to the proto-phonemes

→ They are all interrelated, so you may frequently have to go back and update/revise your hypotheses as proceed through the steps.

3 Doing the comparative method: Polynesian

- Rather than me telling you more about how to do it, let's just jump straight into trying it out.
- Here's data from four Polynesian languages. Use the comparative method to reconstruct *Proto-Polynesian*.

	Tongan	Samoan	Rarotongan	Hawaiian	
1.	tapu	tapu	tapu	kapu	'forbidden'
2.	pito	pute	pito	piko	'navel'
3.	puhi	feula	puʔi	puhi	'blow'
4.	tafaʔaki	tafa	taʔa	kaha	'side'
5.	taʔe	tae	tae	kae	'feces'
6.	taŋata	taŋata	taŋata	kanaka	'man'
7.	tahi	tai	tai	kai	'sea'
8.	malohi	malosi	kaʔa	ʔaha	'strong'
9.	kalo	ʔalo	karo	ʔalo	'dodge'
10.	aka	aʔa	aka	aʔa	'root'
11.	ʔahu	au	au	au	'gall'
12.	ʔulu	ulu	uru	poʔo	'head'
13.	ʔufi	ufi	uʔi	uhi	'yam'
14.	afi	afi	aʔi	uhi	'fire'
15.	faa	faa	ʔaa	haa	'four'
16.	feke	feʔe	ʔeke	heʔe	'octopus'
17.	ika	iʔa	ika	iʔa	'fish'
(12) 18.	ihu	isu	putaŋjo	ihu	'nose'
19.	hau	sau	ʔau	hau	'dew'
20.	tafuafi	siʔa	ʔika	hiʔa	'firemaking'
21.	hiku	siʔu	ʔiku	hiʔu	'tail'
22.	hake	aʔe	ake	aʔe	'up'
23.	huu	ulu	uru	komo	'enter'
24.	maŋa	maŋa	maŋa	mana	'branch'
25.	maʔu	mau	mau	mau	'constant'
26.	maa	mala	mara	mala	'fermented'
27.	naʔa	faʔaŋa	maninia	naa	'quieten'
28.	nofo	nofo	noʔo	noho	'sit'
29.	ŋalu	ŋalu	ŋaru	nalu	'wave'
30.	ŋutu	ŋutu	ŋutu	nuku	'mouth'
31.	vaka	vaʔa	vaka	waʔa	'canoe'
32.	vaʔe	vae	vae	wae	'leg'
33.	laho	laso	raʔo	laho	'scrotum'
34.	lohu	lou	rou	lou	'fruit picking pole'
35.	oŋo	loŋo	roŋo	lono	'hear'
36.	ua	lua	rua	lua	'two'