Theories and Schools of Linguistics: 3ʳᵈ meeting PRELUDE: THE 19ᵀᴴ CENTURY

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Linguistics from time perspectives

- Synchronic (the 20th century and forth linguistics)
- Diachronic/ historical/ (the 19th century linguistics)/ philology:

Synchronic Linguistics

- Synchronic linguistics views a particular state of a language at some given point in time.

- Synchronic linguistics ignores the route by which a language arrives at its present form.

- This could mean *Modern English* of the present day, or the systematic analysis of the system of Shakespeare's English.

- E.g. the modern system of modern English

Diacronic Linguistics

- Diachronic linguistics views the historical development of a language.

- We can go back and forth in time, watching the language with all its features change.

- E.g. the change in sound system of English from old English to modern English

Orientation of diachronic linguistics

- The investigation of the history of languages
- The uncovering of their relationships
- The reconstruction of the lost 'proto-languages' from which families of extant languages descend

Linguists and objects of diachronic linguistics

- Throughout the 19th century linguistics was a German pursuit
- Enormous effort was devoted to the historical study of the Indo-European language family
- Hand in hand with the general intelectual and artistic movement of late 18th to mid-19th century Germany known as Romanticism

Diachronic linguistics and Romanticism

- Rejecting the classical tradition of translating old documents, such as Bible, fairy tales and other stories
- Emphasizing on indigenous ethnic and cultural roots
- Since race, language and culture were assumed to be intimately related, reconstruction of the prehistory of the Germanic and other language-stocks was considered interesting

Two outstandingly influential scientific paradigms towards diachronic linguistics

1. Mechanistic physics: all phenomena could be described by simple, deterministic laws of force and motion – so that all future states of the world could be infered from a complete knowledge of its present state
2. Biological theory of evolution by natural selection

The influence of physics

- Philologist took the notion of describing the history of sound-changes occuring in a language in terms of 'laws' which apply uniformly to whole ranges of examples.
- One of the first discoveries was Grimm's Law

Grimm's Law

- Proto-Indo-European consonants changed in the Germanic branch in accordance with the following rules:

    PIE   Germanic

Voiceless stops [p t k]   >   voiceless fricatives [f θ x]
Voiced stops [b d g]   >   voiceless stops [p t k]
Voiced aspirates [bh dh gh] >   voiced stops [b d g]

The influence of biology

- Linguistics was categorized as a natural science.
- A language must be described objectively along with the rest of the furniture of the natural world.
- Linguists regarded languages as an order of natural organisms.

Bopp (1827) wrote:

- Languages must be regarded as organic bodies, formed in accordance with definite laws; bearing within themselves an internal principle of life, they develop and they gradually die out....

August Pott (1833) expressed:

- A language is in a constant state of change throughout its life: like every organic object, it has its periods of gestation and maturation, times of accelerated and of slackened growth, its prime and gradual extinction....

Thus, a language is a living thing

- The Old English of pre-Conquest days developed successively into Chaucer's English, Shakespeare's and now the different varieties of modern English.
- Groups of languages have 'family trees' just as groups of biological species do.

Examples of language families

- French, Italian and Rumanian descend from Latin
- English, German and Norwegian descend from 'Proto-Germanic'
- Latin, Proto-Germanic and various other known or postulated ancient languages descend from Proto-Indo-European

The 'family tree' theory

- Also known as the *Stammbaum* theory
- Proposed by August *Compendium*, 1861)
- The linguists' language families, languages, dialects and idiolects correspond to the biologists' genera, species, varieties and individuals.
- Languages, like species, compete with one another in a 'struggle for survival' (consider how English has spread at the expense of the Celtic languages: Cornish and Manx are extinct, Welsh and Scottish Gaelic live on but lose ground, Irish is kept alive artificially in a small reserved area.

The rejection towards the family tree theory

- The family tree model failed to fit the facts of Indo-European.
- There were many cases where some trait was common to two language groups lying relatively far apart on Schleicher's tree diagram.
- Schmidt's wave theory emerged.

The wave theory

- Seeing the process of linguistic change instead in terms of innovations originating at different geographical points and spreading outwards over arbitrary areas of territory, so that the resulting languages show a pattern of overlapping rather than hierarchically organized relationships.

The classification of languages based on the change-directional view

- Isolating languages, in which each word consisted of a single unchanging root (i.e. Chinese and Vietnamese)
- Agglutinating languages, in which words include affixes as well as root, but the division of the word into affixes is clear (i.e. Turkish, Bahasa Indonesia)
- Inflecting languages, where a single word includes a number of 'units of meaning' but one cannot assign these meaning-units to distinct proportion of the word (i.e. Sanskrit, Classical Greek and Latin)

Subclassification of inflecting languages (by August Schlegel)

- Synthetic languages (inflecting in the fullest sense)
- Analytic languages (including some characteristics of the isolating type)
- Example: the Romance family of languages is in the process of decay from synthetic Latin to analytic modern languages like French.