

1. Where We're Headed: The Comparative Method

(1) Some Romance cognate sets

Italian	Spanish	Portuguese	French	(Latin)	
/kapra/	/kabra/	/kabra/	/ʃɛvr()/	capra	'goat'
/karo/	/karo/	/karu/	/ʃɛr/	caru	'dear'
/kapo/	/kabo/	/kabu/	/ʃɛf/	caput	'head, top'

Terminology (from the textbook, pp. 125-126):

Comparative method: a method (or set of procedures) which compares forms from related languages, **cognates**, which have descended from a common ancestral language (the **proto-language**), in order to postulate, that is **to reconstruct**, the form in the ancestral language.

Proto-language: (1) the once spoken ancestral language from which daughter languages descend; (2) the language reconstructed by the comparative method which represents the ancestral language from which the compared languages descend.

Sister language: languages which are related to one another by virtue of having descended from the same common ancestor (proto-language) are sisters; that is, languages which belong to the same family are sisters to one another.

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

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

Sound correspondence: in effect, 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.

Reflex: the descendant in a daughter language of a sound of the proto-language is said to be reflected by the sound which descends from it in a daughter language.

1.1 Some General Guidelines for Reconstruction

(i) **Naturalness/Directionality:** Is the sound change natural?

E.g., $k > c > ʃ$ is a typical change; the reverse is not.

Additional evidence comes from Old French documents, which had *cjevɾ()* 'goat', *cjer* 'dear', *cjɛf* 'head'. Further, English loans from that time preserve this sound: *chief* and *Charles*. More recent loans have [s], as in *chef* and *Charlene*.

(ii) **Majority wins;** It is more likely that one language would have undergone a sound change than several independently. See caveats, however.

(iii) **Factoring in the features held in common.** The reconstructed sound should contain features shared by its reflexes. For example, what feature(s) do *p*, *b*, *v* share?

Consider now:

(2) Additional Romance cognate sets

Italian	Spanish	Portuguese	French	(Latin)	
/kolore/	/kolor/	/kor/	/kuloer/	colore	'color'
/korere/	/korer/	/korer/	/kuri(r)/	currere	'to run'
/kostare/	/kostar/	/kostar/	/kuter/	constare	'to cost'

Why does *k* not change in French here?

1.2 The Regularity Principle

Note that an important assumption underling the comparative method is that **sound change is regular**. If a sound could change in unpredictable ways, we wouldn't be able to determine from a given sound in a daughter language what sound or sounds it may have come from in the parent language.

The Regularity Principle/Neogrammarian Hypothesis: Sound change is regular!

2. Types of Sound Change

A sound change is **unconditioned** if the sound changes regardless of context. E.g., in most varieties of Latin American Spanish [ɲ] > [j], e.g. *calle* /kaɫe/ > /kaje/.

A sound change is **conditioned** if the modified sound changes only in specific contexts. E.g., in Spanish, [p] > [b] between vowels.

A **non-phonemic**, or **allophonic**, change preserves the number of phonemes in a language. These changes are also called **shifts**. Examples:

- (3) Allophonic unconditioned changes:
- (a) In some varieties of English, u > ʊ (central unrounded.)
 - (b) In Pipil (spoken in El Salvador), o > u.
- (4) Allophonic conditioned changes:
- (a) In many dialects of Spanish, n > ɲ word-finally, e.g., *bien* ‘well, very’ [bjen] > [bjeɲ].

A **phonemic** change modifies the number of phonemes in a language, through addition or deletion of sounds. Examples: **merger** and **split**.

- (5) A **merger** is a change in which two or more phonemes merge into one, resulting in a smaller phonemic inventory.

(a) In Sanskrit, <i>e, o, a</i> > <i>a</i>	<i>Sanskrit</i>	<i>Latin</i>	
	ad-	ed-	‘to eat’
	danta	dent-	‘tooth’
	dva-	duo	‘two’
	ajra-	ager	‘field’
	apa	ab	‘away, from’

(b) In most varieties of Latin American Spanish, [ɲ] and [j] merged. As a result, *halle* ‘find’ /aɫa/ > /aja/ and *haya* ‘have (subjunctive)’ /aja/ are homophonous.

(c) In dialects of southern English, including Cockney, -/v/, /w/ > /w/, e.g., *wil-lage* ‘village’, *walley* ‘valley’. Merger was stigmatized in local speech, and the greater prestige of the non-merged pronunciations ultimately won out.

- (6) **Split**. *Splits follow mergers*.

- (a) English /n/ had the allophone [ŋ] before velars *k* and *g*. Final *g* was then lost following *ŋ*, leaving /n/ and /ŋ/ in contrast, as in ‘sin’ /sɪn/ and ‘sing’ /sɪŋ/.
- (b) Nahuatl. /s/ originally had the allomorphs [ʃ] before [i] and [s] elsewhere: /sima/ → [ʃima] ‘to shave’, /sima/ → [sima] ‘to prepare plant leaves for extracting fibers’. The phonemes *i,ɨ* then merged to *i*, with ‘to shave’ resulting in [ʃima] and ‘to prepare...’ remaining as [sima] ‘to shave’. As a result of the merger, [ʃ] and [s] split into separate phonemes.
- (c) In English, umlaut created front vowel allophones of back vowels, and these front vowels then became phonemic when the conditioning front vowel was lost:

	<i>mouse</i>	<i>mice</i>	<i>foot</i>	<i>feet</i>
Initial stage	/mu:s/	/mu:s-i/	/fo:t/	/fo:t-i/
	[mu:s]	[mu:s-i]	[fo:t]	[fo:t-i]
Umlaut	/mu:s/	/mu:s-i/	/fo:t/	/fo:t-i/
	[mu:s]	[my:s-i]	[fo:t]	[fø:t-i]
Loss of -i	/mu:s/	/my:s/	/fo:t/	/fø:t/
	[mu:s]	[my:s]	[fo:t]	[fø:t]
Unrounding	/mu:s/	/mi:s/	/fo:t/	/fe:t/
	[mu:s]	[mi:s]	[fo:t]	[fe:t]
Great Vowel Shift	/maus/	/mai:s/	/fu:t/	/fi:t/

2.2 Further Common Kinds of Sound Change

- (7) Assimilation
- (8) Dissimilation
- (9) Deletion
- (10) Epenthesis/Insertion