

## Today's topics:

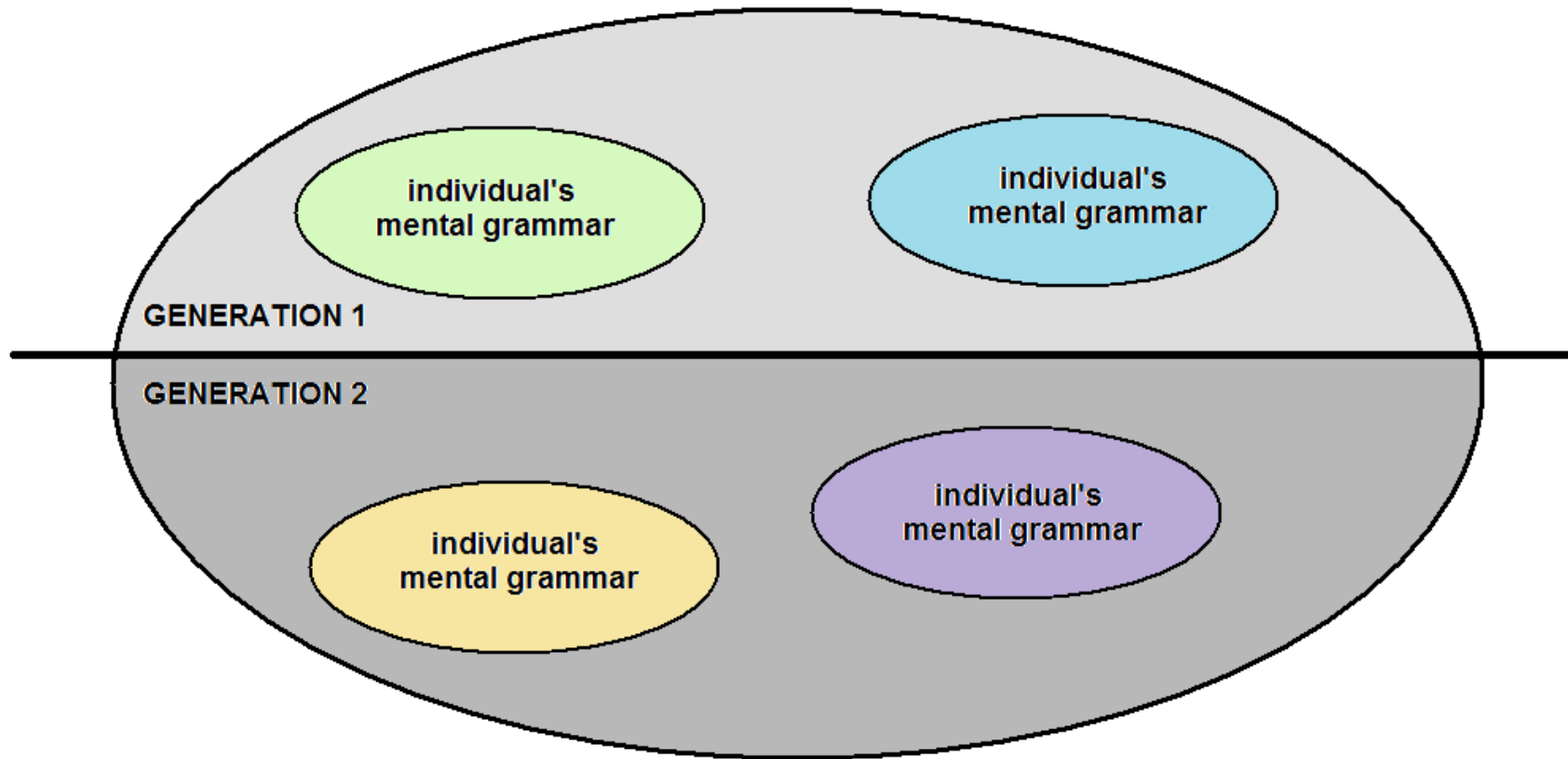
- Introduction to this course
- What is language change?

# Language change and linguistic variation

- This is the historical linguistics course for linguistics majors  
*(warning: don't take both 202 and 525)*
- What does **historical linguistics** mean to you?

# What does it mean to say that “languages change”?

- Where in this diagram of a language community can language change occur?



# What does it mean to say that “languages change”?

## Things that can change over time:

- An adult speaker’s linguistic behavior
- The relative proportion of speakers in a language community with pattern *A* vs. *B*

## Things that can change between generations:

- The linguistic system that a child acquires may not be the same as that of older speakers

**What does it mean to talk about  
“linguistic variation”?**

**What aspects of language can vary?**

# What does it mean to talk about “linguistic variation”?

## What aspects of language can vary?

- Variation between speakers
- Variation across languages in terms of what properties they have

→ How can these aspects of variation be related to language change?

# Focus of this course

## Major questions to be explored

- How and why do languages change over time?
- How can the linguistic history of a language or language family be studied?
- How does variation in a linguistic community relate to language change over time?

# Goals and objectives

- Be able to explain some of the reasons **why** languages change
- Be able to explain some of the mechanisms for **how** languages change
- Understand how work in historical linguistics **informs and is informed by** other areas of linguistics, including:
  - *Phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, (lexical) semantics*
  - *Language acquisition, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics*



# Goals and objectives

- Be able to **apply** the tools of historical linguistics to understand and analyze language data
- Be able to **critically evaluate** claims about language change and language relationships, distinguishing plausible from implausible proposals

**Interlude:**

**Course information and policies**

# What is language change?

- What are some examples of language change that you have personally observed?
- How does society at large feel about language change?

# Group discussion

- Examine the examples of language change your group has been given, and prepare to discuss
- What are some factors that determine whether a particular change will happen (or not)?

# Group discussion

- What are some of the factors that determine whether a particular change will happen?
  - Mental grammar: Is the change in question compatible with a human linguistic system?
  - Plausible precursor: Is the change in question likely to come about as a “misunderstanding” or “reinterpretation” of a preceding linguistic system?
  - Social context: If the change is innovated by a subset of speakers, is it likely to spread to the larger speech community?
- These factors must all be considered