Today’s topics:

• Semantic change
• Lexical change
• Intro to reconstruction
Genetically related languages and comparative reconstruction

**IHL, p 4:** “If we compare two different words used by two different groups of people speaking different languages, and we find that they express a similar (or identical) meaning by using similar (or identical) sounds, then we need to ask ourselves this simple question: Why?”

**Answers we discussed:**
(a) Chance relationship
(b) Borrowing
(c) **Genetic relationship** — common source
Genetically related languages and comparative reconstruction

- If we can assemble information from genetically related languages, we can reconstruct (form hypotheses about) what their common ancestor language was like.

- Starting point: Reconstructing sounds and words of the proto-language;
  - Morphology, syntax, etc., can be reconstructed too; we’ll discuss this a little later.
Genetically related languages and comparative reconstruction

• What do we need in order to reconstruct sounds and words?
  - Sets of **cognate forms** (=descended from same proto-language form) from as many of the descendant languages as possible

Example: ‘wolf’ in Romance languages

- French: [lu]
- Spanish: [loβo] lobo
- Galician: lobu
- Portuguese: [lupo]
- Italian: [lup]
- Romanian: [lup]
Genetically related languages and comparative reconstruction

• How do we tell when forms in the daughter languages are cognate?
  - Similar sound
  - Similar meaning

• What counts as ‘similar sound’?
  - We can take into account our understanding of types of sound change into account in making this decision

• What counts as ‘similar meaning’?
Semantic change

• Goal: To develop a basic understanding of some of the ways in which the meaning of a form can change over time

• Examples: See data handout
  - What **categories** of semantic change can we propose, based on these examples?
Semantic change

• Some commonly discussed categories

A. Retains some connection to original meaning
   - Broadening
   - Narrowing
   - Semantic split (bifurcation)

B. Connection to original meaning lost
   - Semantic shift (...via broadening + narrowing?)

C. Connotations of change?
   - Amelioration — becomes more positive
   - Pejoration — becomes more negative
Semantic change

• Of the semantic types just listed, which is likely to pose the most problems in determining cognate sets? Why?
  - The less obvious the semantic relationship, the weaker the evidence for cognate status (unless, perhaps, the sound correspondences are already very well understood)
Lexical change

• Semantic change = change in the meaning of a form

• **Lexical** change = change in the contents of the lexicon

  - What circumstances could cause a lexical item to be lost?
  - What circumstances could cause a lexical item to be added?
Lexical change

• Some ways of adding new forms to the lexicon
  - Borrowing (*IHL* prefers the term ‘copying’)
  - Creating new words
    . Compounds, etc.
    . Semantic change types discussed above

• See examples on data handout
Borrowing and reconstruction

- What kinds of problems does borrowing pose for reconstructing a proto-language?
  - Borrowing replaces a cognate word with something new, meaning the language at hand doesn’t contribute to figuring out what the proto-language form was like.
  - Borrowing from a related language can be hard to diagnose —> this might lead to incorrect hypotheses about what kinds of sound change have occurred in the language.
Summary: Semantic and lexical change, and implications for reconstruction

• We need to find cognates in related languages in order to reconstruct proto-language forms

• Semantic change means that cognates may not always have identical meanings
  - But, now we have some idea of plausible differences

• Lexical change means that cognates may not always be available
  - Borrowing may make it hard to tell what the real cognates are
Next topic: Comparative reconstruction

Example: ‘wolf’ in Romance languages

French  Spanish  Galician  Portuguese  Italian  Romanian
[lu]   [loβo]   lobo   [lobu]   [lupo]   [lup]

• Based on this information, and what you know about types of sound change, what might we conclude about the proto-Romance word for ‘wolf’? (How does this compare to Latin?)
  - This is a relatively easy example; next time, we will start to consider more complex situations