Today's topics:

- Principles and procedures in comparative reconstruction

Comparative reconstruction

- **Reconstructing** a proto-language: Establishing hypotheses about its sound system and its words (and other linguistic domains)

- We do this by **comparing** sound-meaning pairs that are cognates in descendant languages

The steps of the "comparative method"

- *IHL* Ch 5 introduces (and revises) a procedure known as the **comparative method**, for carrying out comparative reconstruction

- The chapter provides several examples with discussion and comments about where it can get tricky

- Our class discussion will refer to practice examples as we go along

Step 1: Cognates

1 Assemble **cognates**

- This step includes rejecting items from your word list that are not plausible cognates

Step 2: Sound correspondences

2 Write out the full set of **sound correspondences**

- Do this absolutely brute-force systematically, for all words in your data set (unless it's truly huge); otherwise, you may miss parts of the pattern

Step 3: Group the correspondences

3 Group together **phonetically similar** correspondences

- Here we are trying to figure out which correspondences *might* have come from the same proto-language sound so that we can weigh the evidence

Step 4: Consider distribution

4 Look for evidence of **complementary** or **contrastive distribution** for the phonetically similar correspondences

• Question: What can we conclude if two (or more) correspondences are in complementary distribution?

Step 4: Consider distribution

- Question: What can we conclude if two (or more) correspondences are in complementary distribution?

    - Some of the descendant languages may have undergone a **conditioned sound change**

    - What is an alternative possible interpretation when correspondences are in complementary distribution?
      (not mentioned in IHL)

    - How might we choose between the two possible interpretations?

Step 5: Phoneme categories (I)

5 For each correspondence that is not in comp. dist. with another, **assume a separate phoneme** in the proto-language

- This step **takes priority** over ALL the 'plausibility' factors listed in point (6) below

Step 6: Determine the proto-phonemes

6 Make an estimation about the **original form** of each phoneme using the following criteria:

(a) **Plausibility** (given what we know about types of sound change)

(b) Some *secondary* factors to consider

- Can a "gap" be filled in the proto-language phoneme inventory?

- Avoid reconstructing a phoneme that is seen in none of the descendant languages unless this is absolutely necessary

- "Majority rules?" — *only if all else is equal*

Step 7: Phoneme categories (II)

7   For each group of correspondences in complementary distribution, assume they go back to a single proto-language phoneme, and use the criteria in (6) to reconstruct its shape

- Here again, remember that **keeping distinct phonemes distinct** is more important than all other criteria in (6)

Next step: Sound-change rules

- After you have applied the comparative method and reconstructed proto-language sounds and words, you can complete the analysis by listing all the sound-change rules that have applied in each language

- Writing sound-change rules
  - Consider the rules needed for each descendant language separately
  - State the rules as generally and insightfully as possible. Are any of them subcases of a more general process?