

Today's topic:

- **Internal reconstruction**

Methods of reconstruction

- **Comparative reconstruction**
 - Uses cognate sets to compare related languages
 - Goal is to reconstruct a shared ancestor — a **protolanguage**
- **Internal reconstruction**
 - Uses evidence from within one language
 - Goal is to reconstruct an older form of the language — a **prelanguage**
- **Why do internal reconstruction?**

Methods of reconstruction

Why do internal reconstruction?

- When a language has no known relatives, there may be no other option
- When a language has undergone a great deal of change since it diverged, internal reconstruction may help us get it “closer” to its relatives before we attempt comparative reconstruction
- We can do internal reconstruction on a protolanguage!

Internal reconstruction

- Basic idea: Any inconsistencies or complexities we see in the behavior of a language are the result of historical change
 - Internal reconstruction attempts to ‘undo’ a change and hypothesize an earlier, more regular state of the language
- Comments/discussion?

Internal reconstruction

- In essence, the act of applying internal reconstruction to a language means we are making the following **assumptions**:
 - All phonemes used to have one allophone
 - All morphemes used to have a one-to-one sound/meaning relationship
- Are these claims guaranteed to be true?
 - Use internal reconstruction with care
 - It's best justified if a reconstruction unifies multiple phenomena, or makes systematic relationships with other lgs more clear

Examples

- Try it: Huli, in Ex 3 for Ch 7 in IHL (p 133)
- Famous case: Indo-European ‘laryngeals’
 - See case study in IHL, Ch 7
- Another appealing case: Vowels of pre-Old Japanese
 - See data handout
- Doing internal reconstruction often looks a *lot* like doing a regular synchronic linguistic analysis...
 - What’s the difference, conceptually?

Limitations of internal reconstruction

- This method will generally not find **unconditioned** sound changes (why not?)
- It may not reveal the full complexity of changes that have occurred (why not?)
- If we apply internal reconstruction to ‘factor out’ an alternation that was actually present in the protolanguage, our results are misleading
 - What evidence would suggest that an alternation was present in the protolanguage?