

Today's topic:

- **Indo-European and the history of the Comparative Method**

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Early attempts at language comparison

- ‘Etymology’ – the histories of words, and exploring language relationships through similarities between words
 - Pitfalls?
 - See “[How likely are chance resemblances between languages?](#)” by Mark Rosenfelder

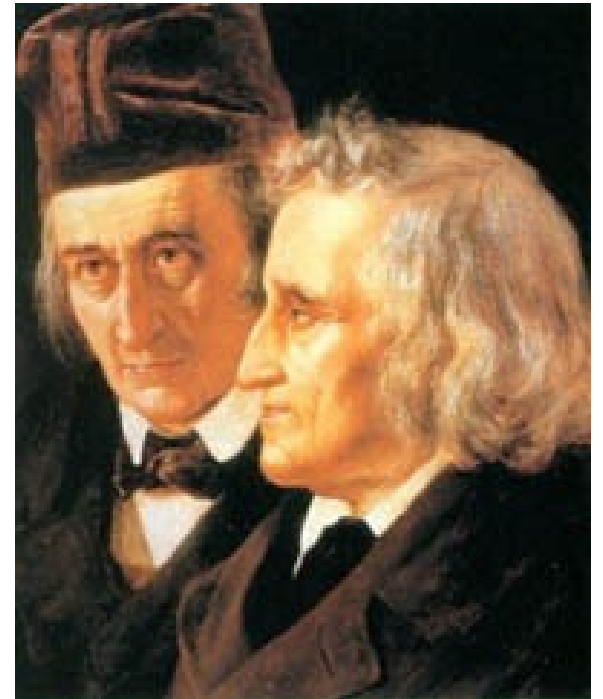
Rasmus Rask (1787-1832)

- Studied similarities in grammar (morphosyntax), not just words
- Proposal: Recurring sound correspondences could not be due to chance → indicate that languages are related
 - (unless what? all together now...)
- Worked on Germanic~Greek correspondences



Jacob Grimm (1785-1863)

- Collected and edited fairy tales (with brother Wilhelm)
- Also studied the history and philology of German
- Famous for “Grimm’s Law” (though the original idea came from Rask)
- Grimm’s Law: see data handout



Early work on reconstruction

- Progress has been made:
 - There are recurring sound correspondences between languages
- But at first these were thought to be sporadic and have exceptions
 - ‘Exceptions’ to Grimm’s Law: see data handout

Herrmann Grassmann (1809-1877)

- Mathematician and scholar of Sanskrit
- Discovered “Grassmann’s Law”: see data handout



Karl Verner (1846-1896)

- Danish “amateur” philologist
- Discovered “Verner’s Law”:
see data handout



Where things stood

- Does Grimm's Law have exceptions?
 - fricative environment
 - Grassmann's Law
 - Verner's Law
- The 'exceptions' are themselves systematic subpatterns – hence the term *law*

Neogrammarian Hypothesis

- Sound-change ‘laws’ are exceptionless
 - Sound-change ‘laws’ refer only to phonetic (*or phonological*) factors, not semantic or grammatical categories
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- This is where we get the insight into the importance of **systematic** sound change in studying language relationships
 - Implications: Does this mean that historical changes affecting sounds do not refer to semantic or grammatical categories?

Neogrammarian Hypothesis

- Implications: Does this mean that historical changes affecting sounds do not refer to semantic or grammatical categories?
 - Clearly not – there is analogy, for one thing
 - But the Neogrammarians would say that analogy is a different process from systematic sound change [and this seems right]
- The claim about conditioning factors in **systematic** sound change only being phonetic is controversial, though
 - Paamese: see data handout

Neogrammarian Hypothesis

- The Neogrammarians acknowledged that there could be “sporadic” sound change as well as systematic sound change
 - When are we justified in claiming that a particular sound change or sound correspondence is sporadic?
- Next class: We will look at some alternatives to the Neogrammarian approach to language change