

Today's topic:

- Evidence from written records

Philology and historical linguistics

- ‘Philology’: Term is used for various aspects of the study of written records
 - For our purposes: We are interested in examining written records to find clues about what the (spoken!) language was like at the time the records were written

Evidence from written records

- What kinds of information can we glean about older stages of a language from examining older documents?

Older pronunciations

- The way words are written in older documents may provide information about older pronunciations
 - **Spelling distinctions** between two older phonemes or sequences that have since merged
 - **Misspellings** can show when a sound change has taken effect (and people start to ‘spell what they hear/say’)
 - **Evidence from poetry** about which words rhyme, have the same stress, etc.

Older pronunciations

- When speakers of one language write down information about another language, that can provide information as well (about either or both languages, in principle)
 - Portuguese spellings of Japanese c. 1600
 - Spanish spellings of Mayan languages in the colonial period
 - Gothic spellings of Greek loanwords
- Of course, people ‘writing down’ an unfamiliar language might not always record the language’s sounds accurately!

Older morphosyntax

- Of course, the information available from written records goes beyond phonology
- We can find evidence for how other parts of the grammar functioned in the past as well
 - Investigations of ‘do-support’ in Middle English

Prescriptive discussions are helpful!

- When someone is writing about how *not* to speak or write, that's a good clue about what people in the language community are actually saying or writing
 - This can be a way of detecting cases of change-in-progress in the past

Examples

- See examples on data handouts
 - English 'silent-*e*' evidence from poetry
 - Evidence from a Latin prescriptivist manuscript warning against spelling errors
- See examples from links
 - Development of English *do* in questions, negation [\[see slide 10 in this class outline\]](#)
 - Chinese characters when used to represent the sounds (not meanings) of Japanese words: Not all <*me*> (etc.) are equal [\[scroll down a little to see 'Table of *man'yōgana*'\]](#)