

Historical and Comparative Linguistics

Fall 2017—Social Sciences 312—Mondays & Wednesdays 4:30-5:45

1 Instructor information

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Hours: TBA

2 Course description

Questions of how languages change, develop and “degrade” along with how they are related dominated linguistics for centuries. Historical and comparative linguistics are still providing insight into how different languages and language families vary, and even give hints as to human origins far beyond the reaches of history.

Historical and comparative linguistics are also just fun. In this class we’ll learn about where words come from, how languages gain and lose their complex morphology and how linguistics can be informative about the human condition and history.

3 Grading

Item	Percent	A	90-100
Final Paper	45%	B	80-89
Paper Outline	10%	C	70-79
Paper Topic	5%	D	60-69
Miniquizzes (10+)	50%	E	59 or below

We’ll have semi-regular **miniquizzes** (which should last no more than five minutes) on class material. These are more of a double-check that you’re internalizing class material. They are not scheduled, but will be about every week. They should be easy for anyone who attends class with a pulse.

You will also write a **paper** on a topic of your choosing, using some of the tools you acquire in the course. It will be due the last day of classes (December 6th). You will turn in an annotated **outline** of this paper with references on October 16th.

You should also submit me a **topic proposal** for the paper by September 15th. This topic can be changed at

any time, but I want to ensure you are thinking about possible topics.

4 Topic List and Schedule

This will change. (But it will only get better.)

Week	Date	Topic
1	08/21	A History of Historical Linguistics
2	08/28	A Basic Look at Sound Change: Romance Languages
3	09/04	The Tools of the Trade and How to Do Bad Historical Linguistics
4	09/11	The “Exceptionlessness” of Sound Laws: Germanic Languages
5	09/18	The Why and How: Grammaticalization and Shift
6	09/25	Proto-Indo-European and the Comparative Method
7	10/02	Internal Reconstruction: History Beyond History
8	10/09	Migrations: Bantu, Amerindians
9	10/16	
10	10/23	Deep Time in Historical Linguistics
11	10/30	Archeology and Genomics
12	11/06	Proto-Everything
13	11/13	Generative Attempts at Historical Linguistics
14	11/20	Where is Linguistics Going?
15	11/27	
16	12/04	Big Finale

5 Book

None. Readings will be occasionally assigned in the form of articles which I will send you or link you to.

6 Administrative

All normal rules of conduct and academic honesty policies apply in this class as you would expect. I expect that you are already familiar with these.

No computers or cell phones whatsoever.