

Fakultätsworkshop 'Fakten und Mythen in der Sprachgeschichte'

19.-20. November 2010

Abstracts

Lyle Campbell - University of Hawai'i

Does the Comparative Method give us Facts or Fictions?

The idea is to example the question, when we apply the comparative method (CM), are the results facts or fictions?, *Gewinnen wir faktische Erkenntnisse, oder konstruieren wir Mythen?* '... to explore what can be reconstructed and what cannot, and hence what the possibilities and the limits of the CM are. I need to work on the content more, but I imagine presenting briefly one or two spectacular achievements of the CM (to show its potential) and then debunking a few claims about what the CM is supposed to not be able to do, as well as looking at real limitations.

Wolfgang Dressler – ÖAW

Myths and facts about diminutives in synchrony and diachrony

In an introductory part I'll deal with the question which facts we want and are able to know in synchrony and diachrony. Here I will contrast descriptivist and mentalist approaches and explicate briefly my own "naturalist" position within mentalist approaches. The type of synchronic facts we are driving at, has to rely heavily on psycholinguistic and other "external" or substantial evidence. Only some of this evidence (e.g. licentia poetica) is available for diachrony, otherwise we are limited to analogical reasoning for which I'll refer to my argumentation about the establishment of scenarios of diachronic change. The second part of the paper will be devoted to synchronic myths and facts about diminutives, particularly to the myth that diminutives denote semantic diminution and may have only secondarily pragmatic meanings. This may be true for French (since the 18th century) and (apparently) for most varieties of English as well as for North Germanic languages. However in nearly all the other European and many extra-European languages pragmatic meanings appear to be primary, semantic meanings secondary.

The third part will analyse, based on these premises, the origin and development of diminutives and augmentatives in several Romance languages.

Aaron Griffith, Institut für Sprachwissenschaft, Universität Wien
Historical Linguistics for the Celtic Linguist: the methodology of fact-finding.

In this talk I will very briefly introduce myself and my work, which concentrates on the older Celtic languages, especially Old Irish. Recently, I have been focusing on synchronic and diachronic syntax, the latter of which, along with syntactic reconstruction, has begun to receive renewed attention in the literature. I will discuss the methods I use in such reconstruction, methods which encompass both traditional philology and internal reconstruction as well as typological comparison and principles of generative grammar, and I will argue that the posited structures are as factual as the phonological and morphological constructs typically posited by practitioners of historical linguistics.

Anna Kretschmer, Institut für Slawistik, Universität Wien
Mythen und Tatsachen der diachronen Slawistik

Präsentation befasst sich überwiegend mit der sog. äußeren Sprachgeschichte - verstanden als Geschichte der schriftlichen Sprachmanifestationen - und zwar vor allem in der vorstandardsprachlichen Phase. Nachfolgend zentrale Thesen / Subthemen der Arbeit: Romantik - das Weltanschauungsparadigma an den Anfängen der slawischen Philologie - als Quelle der grundlegenden Defizite der diachronen Slawistik: engnationale Forschungsweise / Schwäche des kontrastiven Ansatzes, Verherrlichung der sog. Volkssprache. Später auch deutliche Ideologisierung der Sprachgeschichte bzw. Tabuisierung bestimmter Forschungsrichtungen.

Diese Defizite sind besonders deutlich in der sog. Slavia Orthodoxa - dem homogenen sprachlichen und soziokulturellen Areal, zu dem neben den orthodoxen Slawen auch die Rumänen gehörten.

Für dieses Areal können folgende drei zentrale Fragen der diachronen Forschung formuliert werden:

- (1) Beginn der jeweiligen Schriftsprache und die damit verbundene Polemik
- (2) Rolle des Kirchenslawischen in der Geschichte des Schrifttums dieses Areals
- (3) Kontinuität bzw. Diskontinuität der jeweiligen schriftlichen Tradierung.

Diese Fragen, ihre außerwissenschaftlichen Hintergründe und Auswirkungen auch auf die rezente Forschung sollen im einzelnen vorgestellt und erörtert werden.

Johanna Laakso, EVSL / Abteilung Finno-Ugristik, Universität Wien

Historical Linguistics vs. National History: The Tricky Interface

Since the times of Romantic Nationalism, language has been perhaps the most important marker of ethnic identity. In many traditions of national(ist) history-writing the origins and relatedness of the nation, understood as an ethnic group, have been equated with the origins and the relatedness of the national language. Thus, the Finns have learnt to regard themselves as 'Finno-Ugrians' and other Finno-Ugric-speaking nations as their 'sisters and brothers', while in the Swedish history-writing, the idea of the Swedes as the purest and most authentic Germanic nation has played an important role. However, linguistic heritage and continuity as phenomena are deeply different from genetic relatedness or cultural heritage. Ignoring this fact may lead to misuses and misrepresentations of historical linguistics in national history-writing or provoke politically motivated, unscientific reactions, as recently seen in the new wave of ³Anti-Finno-Ugrism² in Hungary. Ultimately, these problems go back to misunderstandings in the interface between (national) history and (historical) linguistics; furthermore, the misinterpretations and abuse of historical linguistics show that there is a more general problem in how linguistics and its methods are understood and known outside the relatively small circles of historical linguists.

Roger Lass, University of Cape Town

Interpreting early Middle English spelling

Until the late 19th century historical linguistics was entirely the study of written language; the first recording of the human voice was made in 1877.

The extraordinary wealth of scholarship in historical phonology up till then was produced without any of the material being heard. All historical phonology therefore is based on inference from the manipulation and interpretation of written symbols. I will deal in this paper with two issues:

1. We tend to think of the 'emic' one-symbol to one-unit design as being the basis of modern alphabetic orthographies. But for any language that has a written history this notion is an anachronistic idealisation. In the history of many European vernaculars it once pertained even less thoroughly than it does now. A version of the classical/antique taxonomic notion of *littera* was a widely-used theory of phonic unit-to-graphic symbol mappings, allowing for, or even encouraging, non-'emic' orthographies. Some early Middle English systems (ca 1150-1325) provide particularly florid examples. At that period, the notion of 'standard', not to mention supralocal standard, did not pertain, and spelling systems could have more flexibility in their design. I want to examine how one interprets orthographies that by modern criteria might seem to be 'perverse': massive overlapping and non-exhaustive representation of 'phonemes'.

2. After considering the nature of these early ME orthographies, some critical questions arise:

How do we assign phonetic values to their symbols? What kind of theoretical objects are our phonetic interpretations? And how may we assign phonic values (and of what kind) to the visual material they present? For instance, it seems not out of order to assign the value [nixt] or [niçt] to a textual representation niht; but what allows us to do this, and what do such representations mean?

Alexandra Lenz, Institut für Germanistik, Universität Wien

Competing diachronic hypotheses in the light of current dialect data

The focus of this paper is on the genesis of the German recipient passive (German GET passive). Although much theoretical and empirical research has already been carried out, there are still a number of unresolved questions concerning this phenomenon. One central problem still disputed is the genesis of the passive construction. According to the research literature, (at least) two different historical pathways are plausible. In this paper, these hypotheses are evaluated against the results of corpus analyses based on historical and current language data.

Hans Christian Luschützky, Institut für Sprachwissenschaft, Universität Wien

Phonetische Erklärungen in der Lautwandelsforschung

In der Sprachwandelsforschung wird seit Rudolf von Raumers Abhandlung über die Ursachen der germanisch-deutschen Lautverschiebungen (1837) immer wieder versucht, extralinguistische Kausalfaktoren festzustellen, die nicht nur den Verlauf, sondern auch die Auslösung von diachronen Veränderungen bestimmen bzw. bewirken: psychologisch-mentale Prinzipien für Morphologie und Syntax, physiologische für die Phonologie. Solchen quasi-mechanistischen Erklärungsansätzen, die sich am Ideal der Naturwissenschaften orientieren und für die, was den Lautwandel betrifft, exemplarisch auf die Arbeiten von Ohala verwiesen werden kann (zuletzt 2005), stehen andere gegenüber, die das gesellschaftliche Moment der Selektion und Diffusion von Neuerungen in den Mittelpunkt stellen (vor allem Labov, zuletzt 2001). Während diese beiden Ansätze trotz ihrer Unterschiede als sprecherzentriert und induktiv bezeichnet werden können und somit nicht grundsätzlich unvereinbar sind, besteht seit dem Strukturalismus das Bestreben, Eigenschaften von Sprachen und alles, was aus ihnen folgt, ohne Rückgriff auf extralinguistische Faktoren im Rahmen einer somit autonomen Theorie (Universalgrammatik) deduktiv zu erklären. Dass der universalgrammatische Ansatz für die Sprachwandelsforschung unfruchtbar ist, ergibt sich aus der Abwesenheit von Dynamik als Theorieelement. Sprecherzentrierten Modellen hingegen fällt es einerseits schwer, das überwiegende Ausbleiben der Effekte ihrer theorieimmanenten Dynamik zu begründen und andererseits die Bedingungen zu präzisieren, unter denen ein mechanistischer Kausalitätsbegriff zum Tragen kommen könnte. An Beispielen aus der Lautgeschichte romanischer Sprachen lässt sich zeigen, dass phonetische Prämissen in der Lautwandelsforschung jedenfalls nicht ausreichen, um die Direktionalität und Generalität von Prozessen zu bestimmen.

Matthias Meyer, Institut für Germanistik, Universität Wien

Sprach-, Text- und Kulturkonstruktionen. Sprachliche Einsprengsel und ihre Konstruktionsleistung in mittelalterlicher Literatur bei Marie de France und Gottfried von Straßburg.

Immer wieder erscheinen in mittelalterlichen Texten Einsprengsel anderer Sprachen: Dichter wie Gottfried von Straßburg und Wolfram von Eschenbach lieben das Französisieren - entweder in Redewendungen, Namen oder auch in - im Falle Gottfrieds - in Rätseln. Man kann das einfach als

Anknüpfung an die modellbildende französische Hofkultur nehmen - würde damit aber eher einem Mythos als einem Faktum der Semantisierung von Fremdsprachverwendung in der (mittelalterlichen) Literatur aufsitzen. Parallel scheint zunächst der Fall der Verwendung keltischer (bretonischer) Namen und Einsprengsel bei Marie de France zu liegen, doch hier sind die kulturellen Voraussetzungen gänzlich anders gelagert und eine genaue Interpretation muss zu anders gelagerten Ergebnissen führen. In meinem Beitrag zum Workshop möchte ich einige Beispiele vorstellen und diskutieren, die die mythen-generierende Leistung spezifischer Fremdsprachverwendungen in literarischen Texten des Mittelalters beleuchten. Wenn Zeit bleibt, möchte ich diese Analyse literarischer Mehrsprachigkeit (nach Bachtin) auch auf Dialektverwendung ausweiten.

Stephan Müller, Institut für Germanistik, Universität Wien

Mythos ‚Mittelhochdeutsch‘.

Die Vorstellung einer ‚Mittelhochdeutschen Dichtersprache‘ als Herausforderung der germanistischen Sprachgeschichtsforschung.

Die Vorstellung einer relativ homogenen, überregional gepflegten ‚Mittelhochdeutschen Dichtersprache‘ war zentraler Mythos einer – nicht zuletzt romantisch geprägten – germanistischen Mittelalterphilologie. Er bestimmte lange die Bewertung der sprachgeschichtlichen Fakten der deutschen Sprache aus der Zeit des Hochmittelalters.

Die germanistische Sprachgeschichtsforschung hat sich zwar von diesem Mythos abgewandt, doch es ist zu beobachten wie sich noch aktuelle Forschungsprojekte mit dieser ‚Erblast‘ auseinander zu setzen haben. Der Beitrag will hier eine problematische aber durchaus auch ‚kreative‘ Wechselwirkung von idealisierender Sprachvorstellung und linguistischer Empirie, von Mythen und Fakten nachzeichnen.

Ádám Nádasy, ELTE, Budapest

Why we disappointed everybody

I will argue that, paradoxically, the most important result of historical linguistics has been that language (as we know it) has no real history. It doesn't go anywhere. Of course, a „p” often becomes „f”, etcetera, but this isn't qualitative, it doesn't have a direction, it isn't real development, just change. (Or we haven't yet been able to understand it?...) This is a marvelous discovery, but it disappoints everybody except us.

- originally (19c) we thought that language had real stages of development: isolating > agglutinating > inflexional. Great idea: not true.
- we also thought that language change reflected cultural change. Great idea: not true (OK, vocabulary may do so, but we don't call that language change, do we?)
- linguistics can prove that languages are related, and we assumed that their speakers are also related. Great idea: not true. And even if they are related, does that mean anything for their life, their cultures, their traditions: Germans and Aryans? Hungarian and Finns? – But this is what the public really wants; they don't care for sound correspondences. In Hungary it has become fashionable to question the Uralic descent of the language because it is so disappointing.

Stephan Prochazka, Institut für Orientalistik, Universität Wien

Facts and myths about the genesis and spread of Arabic dialects

The numerous and highly diversified dialects are the actual mother tongue of approximately 200 million Arabic speakers living between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. This is because Modern Standard Arabic is hardly used in everyday communication but restricted to written or highly formal usage. The deep gap between colloquial and formal speech is reinforced by the fact that the phonology and morphology of Standard Arabic have not changed for almost one and a half millennia.

Arabic dialects are a very fruitful though rather challenging field for historical linguistics, also because the situation is in many respects different from most Indo-European languages. My paper will mainly focus on the spread of Arabic in the aftermath of the great Islamic conquests. The question why, when and how the Arabic dialects emerged is still one of the most discussed subjects in the history of the Arabic language. Crucial points are: Do the numerous Arabic dialects have a common ancestor? If yes, was it Classical Arabic or a dialectal *koine*? Or did Arabic undergo a phase of pidginization and creolization? I shall also discuss whether or not the concepts of European dialectology such as diffusion and wave theory are applicable to explain certain characteristic features of the Arabic dialects.

Nikolaus Ritt, Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Wien

Who benefits from linguistic change? Accounting for principles of English Stress placement in evolutionary terms

In functional historical linguistics any costs and benefits of a linguistic trait are usually conceived of as relating to speakers and their communicative and cognitive needs. However, this well established view appears questionable from the perspective of generalised evolutionary theory. There, one basic assumption is that selection takes place – at least primarily – among replicating constituents (such as genes in biology). Therefore, the costs and benefits which determine the ‘fitness’ and the evolutionary stability of a trait are conceived of as costs incurred by and benefits paid out to those constituents. They are usually measured in terms of the number of copies which get produced of the trait (or rather the constituents coding for it) in a specific population. This paper discusses aspects of English word stress and attempts to show what line of argumentation needs to be pursued, if one regards stress placement as a set of alternative strategies (e.g. ME ¹*ci*tée vs. *ci*¹tée, or ModE *to*¹*access* vs. *to ac*¹*cess*) among which words come to adopt the one(s) that best guarantee(s) their faithful transmission among speakers and generations of such. It will discuss to what extent evolutionary game theory might help to explain and predict the historical stability of different stress patterns.

David Stifter, Institut für Sprachwissenschaft, Universität Wien

Entangled in One's Own Myths: Ascribing Unintelligible Inscriptions to a Language

On the basis of my current research about "Old Celtic Language Remains in Austria", I will present in this paper several more or less puzzling ancient inscriptions which have been assigned to a Celtic language in the past. My own examination of these texts, sometimes undertaken with modern high-tech methods, has revealed that some of them have to be assigned different linguistic traditions, one is a fake, and only one is an authentic Celtic text, even though its "Celticity" is less pronounced than previously thought. I will then turn to the question what reasons, myths and self-persuasions induced earlier scholars to interpret these cryptic texts as Celtic, despite the lack of clear proofs for this assumption.