



12 Study Guide

Language Change: Dynamicity in Language

Terminology

You should be able to simply define or explain the following terms and concepts.

Analogy	Language contact
Assimilation	Language family
Broadening	Lenition
Cognate	Linguistic paleontology
Comparative method	Loanword/borrowing
Conditioned sound change	Narrowing
Decategorialization	Proto-Indo-European
Diachrony	Proto-language
Erosion	Recurring sound correspondences
Family tree	Renewal
Grammaticalization	Routinization
Grimm's law	Synchrony

Important Points and Concepts

- All living languages are dynamic, constantly undergoing processes of change through everyday use by speakers in interaction
- All areas of language undergo change, including sounds, words, meanings, and grammar
- Sound changes are diachronic rules that result from synchronic phonological processes
- Sound changes are regular (occurring everywhere that the conditioned environment is met)
- Sound change can be at the broad systemic level; an example is the Great Vowel Shift
- Due to regular sound change, the Comparative Method can be used to determine degrees of relatedness among languages, reconstruct proto-languages and proto-words, and state the sound changes that occurred to differentiate the daughter languages
- By reconstructing the proto-words of a language, we can determine a significant amount of information regarding the lifestyles and cultures of the speakers of the mother language
- Grammars also change; the most common type of change is grammaticalization, whereby lexical morphemes take on grammatical functions or grammatical morphemes change their grammatical meanings

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Skills

On completion of this chapter, you should be able to perform the following tasks:

- Explain the difference between words that are cognates and words that are borrowed
- Define the term “language family” and name several known families
- Say what the Comparative Method is and what it is used for
- Apply the Comparative Method to a data set, reconstructing proto-forms and stating sound changes
- Identify different types of sound change
- Given data, write a rule describing a sound change
- State the position of English in the Indo-European language family
- State some of the sound changes that occurred in the history of English
- Describe the Great Vowel Shift in English and its impact on spelling and pronunciation of English words
- Identify different types of semantic change
- Explain in general terms where grammatical markers come from
- Name and describe processes involved in grammaticalization
- Discuss linguistic paleontology and the sorts of information that you can learn by reconstructing proto-languages