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## Analysis the Studies into Comparative Linguistics

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**Abstract:** In these article different researches and their critical statements and assumptions are presented so as to get common relationships connected to comparative linguistics.

**Keywords:** Comparative linguistics, Neogrammarian principle, lexicostatistics, ancestral language, phylogenetic methods, proto-language.

**Comparative linguistics**, formerly **Comparative Grammar**, or **Comparative Philology**, study of the relationships or correspondences between two or more languages and the techniques used to discover whether the languages have a common ancestor. Comparative grammar was the most important branch of linguistics in the 19th century in Europe. Also called comparative philology, the study was originally stimulated by the discovery by Sir William Jones in 1786 that Sanskrit was related to Latin, Greek, and German.<sup>1</sup>

An assumption important to the comparative method is the Neogrammarian principle that the laws governing sound change are regular and have no exceptions that cannot be accounted for by some other regular phenomenon of language. As an example of the method, English is seen to be related to Italian if a number of words that have the same meaning and that have not been borrowed are compared: *piede* and “foot,” *padre* and “father,” *pesce* and “fish.” The initial sounds, although different, correspond regularly according to the pattern discovered by Jacob Grimm and named Grimm’s law (*q.v.*) after him; the other differences can be explained by other regular sound changes. Because regular correspondences between English and Italian are far too numerous to be coincidental, it becomes apparent that English and Italian stem from the same parent language. The comparative method was developed and used successfully in the 19th century to reconstruct this parent language, Proto-Indo-European, and has since been applied to the study of other language families.<sup>2</sup>

Comparative linguistics, or comparative-historical linguistics (formerly comparative philology<sup>3</sup> is a branch of historical linguistics that is concerned with comparing languages to establish their historical relatedness.

Genetic relatedness implies a common origin or proto-language and comparative linguistics aims to construct language families, to reconstruct proto-languages and specify the changes that have resulted in the documented languages. To maintain a clear distinction between attested and reconstructed forms, comparative linguists prefix an asterisk to any form that is not found in surviving texts. A number of methods for carrying out language classification have been developed, ranging from

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/science/comparative-linguistics>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/science/comparative-linguistics>

<sup>3</sup> "Comparative linguistics". Encyclopædia Britannica. 2011. Retrieved 23 April 2019.

simple inspection to computerized hypothesis testing. Such methods have gone through a long process of development.

The earliest method of this type was the comparative method, which was developed over many years, culminating in the nineteenth century. This uses a long word list and detailed study. However, it has been criticized for example as subjective, informal, and lacking testability.<sup>4</sup> The comparative method uses information from two or more languages and allows reconstruction of the ancestral language. The method of internal reconstruction uses only a single language, with comparison of word variants, to perform the same function. Internal reconstruction is more resistant to interference but usually has a limited available base of utilizable words and is able to reconstruct only certain changes (those that have left traces as morphophonological variations).

In the twentieth century an alternative method, lexicostatistics, was developed, which is mainly associated with Morris Swadesh but is based on earlier work. This uses a short word list of basic vocabulary in the various languages for comparisons. Swadesh used 100 (earlier 200) items that are assumed to be cognate (on the basis of phonetic similarity) in the languages being compared, though other lists have also been used. Distance measures are derived by examination of language pairs but such methods reduce the information. An outgrowth of lexicostatistics is glottochronology, initially developed in the 1950s, which proposed a mathematical formula for establishing the date when two languages separated, based on percentage of a core vocabulary of culturally independent words. In its simplest form a constant rate of change is assumed, though later versions allow variance but still fail to achieve reliability. Glottochronology has met with mounting scepticism, and is seldom applied today. Dating estimates can now be generated by computerised methods that have fewer restrictions, calculating rates from the data. However, no mathematical means of producing proto-language split-times on the basis of lexical retention has been proven reliable.

Another controversial method, developed by Joseph Greenberg, is mass comparison.<sup>5</sup> The method, which disavows any ability to date developments, aims simply to show which languages are more and less close to each other. Greenberg suggested that the method is useful for preliminary grouping of languages known to be related as a first step toward more in-depth comparative analysis.<sup>6</sup> However, since mass comparison eschews the establishment of regular changes, it is flatly rejected by the majority of historical linguists.<sup>7</sup>

Recently, computerized statistical hypothesis testing methods have been developed which are related to both the comparative method and lexicostatistics. Character based methods are similar to the former and distanced based methods are similar to the latter (see Quantitative comparative linguistics). The characters used can be morphological or grammatical as well as lexical.<sup>8</sup> Since the mid-1990s these more sophisticated tree- and network-based phylogenetic methods have been used to investigate the relationships between languages and to determine approximate dates for proto-languages. These are considered by many to show promise but are not wholly accepted by traditionalists. However, they are not intended to replace older methods but to supplement them. Such statistical methods cannot be used to derive the features of a proto-language, apart from the fact of the existence of shared items of the compared vocabulary. These approaches have been challenged for their methodological problems, since without a reconstruction or at least a detailed list of

<sup>4</sup> See for example Language Classification by Numbers by April McMahon and Robert McMahon

<sup>5</sup> Campbell, Lyle (2004). *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: The MIT Press

<sup>6</sup> Greenberg, J. H. (2001). "The methods and purposes of linguistic genetic classification". *Language and Linguistics* 2: 111–135

<sup>7</sup> Ringe, Don. (1993). "A reply to Professor Greenberg". *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 137,1:91–109. doi:10.1007/s101209900033. JSTOR 986947

<sup>8</sup> Greenhill, S. J., Q. D. Atkinson, A. Meade, and R. D. Gray. (2010). "The shape and tempo of language evolution Archived 28 January 2018 at the Wayback Machine". *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 277, no. 1693: 2443–50. doi:10.1098/rspb.2010.0051. JSTOR 25706475

<sup>8</sup> See for example Language Classification by Numbers by April McMahon and Robert McMahon

phonological correspondences there can be no demonstration that two words in different languages are cognate.

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