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Indo-European 'heel'

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It is well known that the consonant initials of many Indo-European roots show irregular correspondences. Notorious is the so-called »movable s«, which appears in some reflexes of a root, but is absent in the others. We also find unexpected aspiration, different order of the consonants, »prothetic« vowels, etc. It has often been suggested that these irregularities are due to heavy initial clusters, which were simplified in various ways, but there are only a few cases where this can be demonstrated (e.g. the IE word for 'female breast, nipple' is *psten- with the preserved cluster in Iranian, but with st- in Sanskrit, Greek, Armenian and sp- in Baltic, Celtic, Germanic; derivatives of this root reflecting *pstn- lose the t in Indo-Iranian). In my paper, I shall argue that the IE word for 'heel' (~~*tperseh2~~) is derived from the verb 'to kick with the foot' (*sp(h)erH-). Through internal reconstruction we arrive at PIE *tsper(H)-, which provides new evidence for the development of the IE initial clusters.

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The comparative method

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A thorough review of the problems, assumptions and methods of comparative linguistics is given. It is shown that the concept of distance is of paramount concern both for phonological and semantic aspects of the comparative method. Different distance metrics, their results and their relationships to the heuristic and intuitive comparative method is shown. The importance of basic vocabulary, and the formalization of such concepts in the form of Swadesh-like lists is demonstrated and explained. Relationships of distinctive features, shared innovations and shared retentions in family trees is discussed in terms of distance and similarity. The role of regular sound change, its meaning, its importance and its heuristic value as manifested in various distance metrics is demonstrated.

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Quantitative historical linguistics

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The dominant model of language change in historical linguistics has been the »divergence« model. There are variations of this, such as the 'wave' model. However other models are also possible, such as the »convergence« model, or »divergence-convergence« model. Still others are combinations of these with the »lingua franca« spreading model. Which of these should be selected could be dependent on time, and size of the community of speakers. Furthermore, until 2001 only the regular/recurrent sound change heuristic was used both as a reconstruction tool and as a test. Variations of this included the shift test. The first attempt to use mathematics/statistics in a coherent way in historical linguistics was due to Ringe.. However, now it is possible to use other statistical methods e.g. chi-square test (Kessler). First attempts at creating classifications were heuristics and mimicked biology. Now other bifurcation-tree/dendogram methods to create trees can be derived from genetics (Warnow, et al). This session is devoted to the examination of these methods, new methods and effects of these on the future of historical linguistics.

Refereces

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