

DIACHRONIC VARIATION OF LANGUAGE

Language changes and changes spread over a period of time are characterised by a certain regularity. The element of consistency within such a change might cast light on the possible causes of change.

The different dialects of a language may be studied in order to understand the diversification and historical evolution of a language. When two or more dialects become sufficiently divergent, they are said to be genetically related languages. The differences between genetically related languages may be in phonology, lexis, and syntax. When it is said that a resemblance between some languages is due to relationship, it is meant that these languages are later forms of a single earlier language. In most cases there are few records of the speech that has to be reconstructed.

Much of the gathering of diverse language material that took place in the eighteenth century was rather haphazard. The character of historical linguistics took a proper form when William Jones (an English jurist in India) wrote in 1785 - "The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either; yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar than could possibly be produced by accident."

The most important scholars of the early nineteenth century were Rask, Grimm, Bopp, and Von Humboldt. It was Grimm who indicated the system underlying the relationship. What Grimm referred to as sound shift, a general tendency, is now known as 'Grimm's Law'.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the most influential figure in linguistics was A. Schleicher (1821-68). In the 1870s a group of linguists came together in Leipzig. Originally known as the 'Leipzig School'. The neo-grammarians were the first to take serious interest in extinct dialects. They rejected Schleicher's claim that language was to be regarded as a living organism and borrowed Whitney's ideas put forward in the 1860s and 1870s according to which language was the product of society. Some linguists got combined and a new school called the neo-linguistic school led by Bartoli and Bonbanti came into existence in Italy. They wanted to explain them rather than simply describe linguistic facts and showed considerable interest in semantics.

Saussure, who himself had been trained in a neo-grammarian spirit, renounced the historical approach to linguistic analysis and in the wake of Saussure's synchronic-diachronic distinction, the historical