Historical linguistics – lecture 3 NEOGRAMMARIAN SOUND CHANGE

- **taxonomy of sound change (traditional view)**

Assimilation (typically regular, conditioned)
classified in terms of the following dichotomies: *total-partial, contact-distant, regressive-progressive*
partial: OE *efn* 'even' → West-Saxon *emn*
total: L. septem 'seven' → It. sette
regressive: septem → sette
progressive PrGmc *wulno → OE wull 'wool'
distant: *penk^{w}e → k^{w}enk^{w}e → L. quinque 'five'
Dissimilation (tends to be sporadic, occurs in isolated words)

Latin	Old French	English loan
peregrīnus →	pelerin	pilgrim
purpura →	purpre	purpre → purpel → purple

Epenthesis (when segments are inserted)
Latin *schola* 'school' → Old French *escole* (→French *ecole*)
hamster [hæm^{p}stə], prince [prɪn^{t}s]

Loss (depending on the segment which is lost we distinguish)

- **apocope** (when a final vowel is lost)

ME [nɑ:mə] → MnE *name* [neim]

- **syncope** (when a medial vowel is lost)

OE *munecas* → MnE *monks*

- **apheresis [**ə'ferɪsɪs] (when an initial sound is lost)

Latin *apotēca* 'storehouse' → Spanish *bodega*

- **haplology** (when a whole syllable is lost)

Old Latin **stipipendium* → Latin *stipendium* 'soldier's pay'
OE *Englalond* → MnE *England*

other frequent types of sound changes

- **compensatory lengthening**

OE *niht* → ME *nïẗ* → MnE *night*

- **metathesis**

OE *brid* → MnE *bird*
OE *hros* → MnE *horse*

- **palatalisation (kind of assimilation)**

MnE *nature*, *picture* with [tʃ] ← [tj], or *pleasure*, *treasure* with [ʒ] ← [zj]

- **diphthongisation** (parts of GVS)
- **monophthongisation** (WGmc ɑi → OE æ:)
- **lenition (weakening)**

involves the progress of a segment through a sequence of weakening changes :

weakening: voicing → fricative → glide → vowel → zero
k→ g → ɣ → w → u → ɸ

OE *lagu* [laɣu] 'law' → ME *lawe* → MnE *law* [lɔ:] (ɣ → w → ɸ)

Major approaches to sound change:
Before the 19th century, there was no scientific study of sound change. Sound change and language change generally were considered to be bad – signs of decay from an earlier ideal state. Most discussion of sound change was unsystematic and atomistic, consisting of a mere cataloguing of changes. Explanations offered ranged from the Tower of Babel story to the alleged effect of diet, climate or race on language.

Neogrammarians
The **Neogrammarians** (German *Junggrammatiker*) were a German school of linguists, (including Karl Brugmann, Hermann Osthoff, Hermann Paul, Eduard Sievers, Karl Verner) originally at the University of Leipzig, in the last quarter of the 19th century.
August Leskien first used the famous expression 'sound laws admit of no exceptions' which earned the group a humorous local nickname 'die junggrammatische Richtung'. Later famously rephrased by Verner in 1872 'no exception without a rule' or 'there must be a rule for irregularity – the problem is to find it'.

The main tool they used in their account of historical development of languages was the **regularity hypothesis**. According to this hypothesis, a diachronic sound change affects simultaneously all words in which its environment is met, without exception. Sound change is regular and exceptionless. Verner's law is a famous example of the Neogrammarian hypothesis, as it resolved an apparent exception to Grimm's law. The Neogrammarian hypothesis was the first hypothesis of sound change to attempt to follow the principle of falsifiability according to scientific method.

The regularity hypothesis may be described as composed of two parts: (1) a technique for comparative linguistic research; (2) a question as to why the procedure should be so successful together with the possible answers.

(1) discussed at length already (see previous handout)
(2) involves two issues really – a) what languages are like; b) how languages change

Neogrammarians provided no overt discussion of (a). As far as (b) goes there was general agreement that languages change as a result of **borrowing**, **analogy**, and **sound change** (no discussion of whether these are kinds, causes or mechanisms of change). As regards **sound change** the two moot points were these: (1) what features of language design can legitimately be included in the specification of environment for a 'conditioned sound change' (2) Are attested sound shifts merely the result of analogy or borrowing or do they reflect the workings of a **MECHANISM** of linguistic change distinct from and not reducible to analogy or borrowing?
Typical Neogrammarian position holds that: (1) the sounds of a parent language conditions sound change; (2) there is a mechanism os linguistic change called **SOUND CHANGE** without which there would be no discernible underlying regularity in linguistic change and the comparative method would yield no results.

The clearest and most influential formulation of the neogrammarian **Theory of phonological change** is found in the third chapter of Paul's (1880) *Grundzüge der Sprachgeschichte*. According to Paul, phonological information is stored by the speaker in two forms: as ***auditory representations*** (*Lautbilder*) and as ***articulatory representations*** (*Bewegungsgefühle*). One form of phonological change (Lautwandel) takes place in that the execution of articulatory movements changes and that these changes in turn lead to changes in the articulatory representations themselves. There are two ways in which the execution of articulatory movements can change and accordingly two major manifestations of *Lautwandel*:

ARTICULATORY DRIFT (Verschiebund des Bewegungsgefühles) and ***REPLACEMENT*** (Vertauschung der Elemente).

In **ARTICULATORY DRIFT**, the articulation of the minimal phonetic elements (it is not clear what these elements are) undergoes gradual shift. The shift is subject to the constraint that the resulting auditory deviation must not transcend the threshold of conscious perception (Kontrolle des Lautbildes). Phonological change takes place in that the articulatory representations are continually revised to match these shifts in their execution. Aware that merely random fluctuations of articulation could have no effect, Paul proposes that a tendency towards greater **facility of articulation** lends a directionality to the drift. But what facility of articulation is and how it is to be determined is left unspecified except for the statement that assimilation increases it, and that it depends in part on the phonological systems of the language.
It has been long realized that this gap in Paul's theory is impossible to fill, there being no way of defining facility of articulation so that it would account for what sound changes actually happen. Hence the idea of articulatory drift is in effect quite empty.

In **REPLACEMENT**, phonetic elements are replaced by others in individual productions of words because of slips of the tongue. These slips of the tongue become part of the language through being adopted as correct forms by oncoming generations of language learners. As examples of replacement Paul mentions metathesis, assimilation and dissimilation, and presumably epenthesis and apocopation should be added to complete his list.

But there is another way, according to Paul, in which phonological changes amounting to the same effect, largely, as articulatory drift and replacement may take place. This is that children deviate from theirlinguistic models and from the beginning form articulatory representation which differ from those of the speakers who provide their linguistic experience. Changes of this type must be sufficiently insignificant to escape correction; they can thus either result in the kinds of metathesis, assimilation, etc. brought about by replacement or else in differences of articulatory representation with minimal acoustic consequences, such as that of dorsal and alveolar *t*
In this respect, there is a curious equivocation and ambiguity in Paul's theory as to which of the postulated mechanisms is to be considered the basic form of **PHONOLOGICAL CHANGE**.

SUMMARY:

Neogrammarians assumed that sound change operates by imperceptible phonetic increments, but simultaneously in all lexical items with the appropriate context. Sound change is thus **phonetically gradual and lexically abrupt**. Traditionally criticised on a number of grounds: 1) numerous examples of lexical diffusion (where a sound change affects only a few words at first and then gradually spreads to other words) have been attested; 2) the notion that sound change is phonetically gradual is unsuitable for changes like metathesis, devoicing or nasalisation, epenthesis or loss.
Important features of this approach
The object of linguistic investigation is not the language system, but rather **the idiolect**, that is, language as it is localized in the individual, and therefore is directly observable.
Autonomy of the sound level: being the most observable aspect of language, the sound level is seen as the most important level of description, and absolute autonomy of the sound level from syntax and semantics is assumed.
Historicism: the chief goal of linguistic investigation is the description of the historical change of a language.
Analogy: if sound laws fail, analogy can be applied as an explanation if plausible. Thus, exceptions are understood to be a (regular) adaptation to a related form. Sturtevant's paradox: sound change is regular but creates irregularity, analogy is irregural but creates regularity.