LX 360/660: Historical and Comparative Linguistics (Fall 2016)

Alexander Nikolaev

Lecture: Tuesday and Thursday 12:30–2pm (CAS 204B)

Office Hours: Tuesday 3:00–4:00 pm or Thursday 2:00–4:00 pm, or by appointment (arrange by email: nikol@bu.edu). My office is in the Department of Classical Studies, 745 Comm. Ave (STH 417). You are always welcome to drop by my office, even outside of office hours, but I recommend sending an email in advance, to make sure that I am in.

Contacting me: The best way to contact me is by email. If you would like to speak to me in person, but cannot make the office hours, send me an email and I will do my best to accommodate you.

Aims and scope of the course:
This course explores different approaches to historical linguistics, the study of language change. We will discuss various types of linguistic change (phonological, morphological, semantic, and syntactic) and the methods used to investigate these changes. Another important topic of this course is linguistic reconstruction (reconstruction of protolanguages), its methods and goals. We also explore the social and linguistic motivations for linguistic change. Finally, we will consider language contact and borrowing, the genetic/genealogical classification of languages, and the insights historical linguistics brings to understanding prehistory.

Learning objectives:
After successfully completing this course you will
- acquire some knowledge of the main linguistic families;
- develop the abilities to reconstruct basic protoforms based on a comparative analysis and internal reconstruction;
- be able to recognize and analyze sound change and analogical change;
- be able to apply principles of dialectology in grouping dialects;
- get acquainted with some of the current issues in the field (grammaticalization, lexical diffusion, macrofamilies)

Grading Scale:
A 94–100  B+  87–89  C+  77–79
A- 90–93  B  84–86  C  74–76  D  60–69  (No curving of the grades)
B- 80–83  C-  70–73  F  < 60

Assessment:
- Class involvement (regular attendance of lectures and sections; showing evidence of understanding through answers to questions posed in class) — 5%
- 5 homework assignments — 50%
- Midterm exam (in-class, 50 minutes) — 15%
- Final exam (120 minutes) — 30%

Extra credit:
There will be an opportunity to earn extra credit by completing extra assignments.
**Course policies:**

Attendance is expected at all lectures and discussion sections. Class attendance is absolutely essential. If you do not show up, then you will not do well! It is your responsibility to inform me in advance about any potential time conflicts. Come to class prepared and read the assigned textbook chapters and texts **BEFORE** we discuss the material in class.

Makeup examinations require either (1) my approval given **IN ADVANCE** of absence or (2) appropriate medical documentation. Makeup examinations are also allowed to students who were absent because of religious observance or participation in intercollegiate athletics.

Using a phone or an electronic device with similar functionality during a quiz or an examination will lead to an immediate **zero** grade for that quiz or exam.

I recommend writing your notes by hand, but if you want to type them on your laptop, it is fine by me.

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at BU and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. For definitions, policies, and procedures regarding cheating and plagiarism please refer to the Academic Conduct Code (www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code), which you are expected to know and follow. In particular, no collaboration of any kind is allowed on the tests.

If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask.

Schedule

SEPTEMBER

Wk1  Thu 8  Orientation and Introduction
Wk2  Tue 13 Languages of the world
     Thu 15  Writing systems
Wk3  Tue 20  The discovery of Indo-European
     Thu 22  Sound change
Wk4  Tue 27  Sound change
     Thu 29  Sound change

OCTOBER

Wk5  Tue 4  Analogy
     Thu 6  Analogy
Wk6  Tue 11  no class: Monday schedule
     Thu 13  Syntactic change
Wk7  Tue 18  Syntactic change
     Thu 20  Morphological change
Wk8  Tue 25  Semantic change
     Thu 27  Semantic change

NOVEMBER

Wk9  Tue 1  Lexical borrowing and language contact
     Thu 3  Pidgins and creoles
Wk10 Tue 9  Grammaticalization
       Thu 10  How language change occurs?
Wk11 Tue 15  Language and dialect
       Thu 17  Internal reconstruction
Wk12 Tue 22  Internal reconstruction
       Thu 24  Thanksgiving Recess
Wk13 Tue 29  Comparative method: establishing language relationship

DECEMBER

Thu 1  Long-range comparison
Wk14 Tue 6  Language and prehistory
       Thu 8  Further vistas