

Typology I: Homework for Lecture 2, 2016/04/20

(The questions marked with (*) are research questions you can use to deepen your understanding, the others could be exam questions.)

1. A Hungarian friend has seen an internet video proving that Hungarian is not related to Finnish at all, but descended from Sumerian. The following list of word equations is given in the video to prove that mainstream Uralistics is nothing but a conspiracy. Explain to him/her why the data are problematic, and why a linguist will not accept this sort of argument.

Gloss	Sumerian	Hungarian	Finnish
“to hear”	hal	hall	kuulla
“bridge”	id	híd	silta
“moon”	húl	hold	kuu
“long”	uš	hosszú	pitkä
“cool”	sid	hűs	kylmä
“jealous”	erim	irigy	mustasukkainen
“horror”	ušum	iszony	kauhu
“palm”	tibit	tenyer	kämmen
“lake”	túl	tó	järvi
“wild”	bad	vad	villi
“to cut”	ag	vág	leikata

2. Here is some further data about parts of the High German Consonant shift. Based on these data, determine regular sound correspondences between the languages, and build a hypothesis about the historical development. Finally, using your knowledge of phonology, try to describe the observed phenomenon as concisely as possible.

Gloss	Dutch	High German	Swiss German
“apple”	[ˈʔapəl]	[ˈʔapfl]	[ˈʔœpfu]
“cat”	[kɑ:t]	[katsə]	[kxats]
“path”	[pat]	[pfa:t]	[pfɑ:t]
“plough”	[plu:χ]	[pflu:k]	[pfly:k]
“two”	[tve:]	[tsvai]	[tsvɛɪ]
“to come”	[ˈkɔ:mə]	[ˈkɔmn]	[ˈkxɔ]

3. Imagine that you have reconstructed the proto-languages of all language families. Treat these reconstructions as languages, and reapply the comparative methods to reconstruct their common ancestors. Moving back into pre-history by applying this method again again, it should be possible to move up in the language tree until you arrive at the common proto-language of humankind. Why do most linguists believe that it is impossible to reconstruct Proto-World in this way?
4. Explain in your own words what a Swadesh list is, and what it is used for. Why are these lists typically so short? Name examples of possible problems you might encounter if you want to build a large Swadesh-type list that can be applied across cultures and climate zones.

5. For each of the following concepts, decide whether they are good candidates for a Swadesh list. Explain your decisions using the criteria discussed in the lecture.
- bread
 - louse
 - interesting
 - to snore
 - snow
 - steel
6. (*) Pick ten concepts from the Swadesh list given in the lecture, and choose three languages (e.g. your native language, a closely related language, and an unrelated language from another continent). Write down (or look up) the translations of your ten concepts in your three languages.
- Count the number of similar words for each language pair.
 - Does the number of similar words reflect the established genealogical relationships? In case you know enough about the history of your languages: are the similar words true cognates?
 - Are there any similar words between unrelated languages? Is there any plausible explanation?