Today

- Historical linguistics
- From language birth...to language extinction
- Endangered languages
- Language change
- Language families

Readings: 12.1-12.2
From language birth...to language death

- Creoles: the “newest” languages in the world today are the result of creolization
  - 1970s: Nicaraguan sign language
  - 1850s: Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea)
  - 1770s: Seselwa (Seychelles, Madagascar)
From language birth...to language death

- Creoles: some are becoming national languages (Tok Pisin), others are, like conventional languages, dying out.
  - Why do languages die?

Loss of native speakers: *cultural transmission ends* when there are no children learning it

- all speakers die (cataclysm or population attrition)
- speakers are absorbed by another culture with another language and *social need for the language decreases*
From language birth...to language death

- Types of language death:
  - **Sudden** -- all speakers die or are killed (e.g. Tasmanian)
  - **Radical** -- speakers stop using the language under threat of political repression or genocide (Nez Perce)
  - **Gradual** -- (most common) minority language dies out in contact with socially dominant language
  - **Bottom-to-top** -- survives only in a few contexts (e.g., Latin: liturgical usages)
Endangered languages

- Only 20% of Native American languages remaining in the US are being natively learned by children
- Comanche, Apache, Cherokee becoming extinct (like Indo-European lgs Hittite, Tocharian, Cornish)
- Some languages are being revitalized
Revitalization

- **Language Revitalization** refers to any deliberate effort to recover the spoken use of a language that is no longer spoken or learned at home
  - corpus planning
  - status planning
- **Virginia Algonquian** (aka Potomac, Chesapeake)

  December 2006, Washington Post article
Revitalization

- **corpus planning**
  - modernization of the lexicon (vocabulary)
  - implement a writing system
- **status planning**
  - build lay loyalty
    - Irish: “We will not go along with the mistaken view that this wailing over the language is all sentimentality”
  - accept language in broader range of social functions
Revitalization

Why?

- “Through its grammar, each language provides new evidence on the nature of human cognition. And in its literature, poetry, ritual speech, and word structure, each language stores the collective intellectual achievements of a culture...” (Fromkin et al. 2007)
- There are ~6,000 languages in the world
- ~3,000 of these have died or will die during the present century
- Endangered Language Fund
  - http://www.endangeredlanguagefund.org/
Language change

- Languages are constantly changing
- Language change is normal
- Language change ≠ decay, corruption
Historical Linguistics

- Concerned with
  - How languages change over time
  - How languages are related to one another

- **Diachronic** change: language change over time

- **Synchronic** change: language change at a particular point in time
Historical Linguistics

- Sir William Jones (1788): noted that Sanskrit shared many similarities with Greek, Latin
- He suggested they had a common ancestor
Comparative Method

- Deducing genetic relations between languages by comparing cognates
  - **Cognates**: words from different languages that are similar in form and meaning, suggesting a common origin
- Used to reconstruct the **proto-language** (ancestor language)
# ‘month’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Related</th>
<th>Not related</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>month</td>
<td>shahr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maand</td>
<td>Maand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monat</td>
<td>hilabethe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>månad</td>
<td>ay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mis</td>
<td>bulan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mí</td>
<td>inyanga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mois</td>
<td>yue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mes</td>
<td>timgalu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mês</td>
<td>thang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mese</td>
<td>iyanvda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>myesyats</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mahina</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>nuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>Nacht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scots</td>
<td>nicht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>natt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>nat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>noch'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>nox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanskrit</td>
<td>nakti-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>natë</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>noche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>noite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>notte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalan</td>
<td>nit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic</td>
<td>nótt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian</td>
<td>naktis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proto-Indo-European (PIE)

- The proposed parent language of all Indo-European languages
- No direct evidence for it (unwritten)
- Reconstructed from later Indo-European languages by back-tracking known sound changes
Family Tree Model

- Indicates genetically related languages that share common ancestor
- The higher up in the tree, the older it is
  - Mother/parent
  - Daughters
  - Sisters
Latin

French  Italian  Spanish  Portuguese

← Mother

← Daughters

← Sisters
Extinct langs
Sub-families
Language Isolates

- No known relatives
  - Basque (Spain)
  - Zuni (New Mexico)
Family Tree Model: problems

- Implies each language is separate, independent from its neighbors
  - But distinctions btw. languages are fuzzy
- Suggests new languages appear/branch off suddenly
  - But languages diverge gradually
- Cannot accommodate mixed languages
Family Tree Model: problems

- Cannot accommodate creoles (mixed languages)
  e.g. China Coast Pidgin English (1600-1800)

Is CCPE in some sense “more closely related” to Early Modern English than to Cantonese?
Family Tree Model: problems

- China Coast Pidgin English should be represented, because it has offspring:
  - China Coast PE
  - South Seas Jargon
  - Sandalwood English
  - Early Melanesian Pidgin
    - Australian PE
    - Roper River Creole
    - New Hebrides Pidgin
    - Tok Pisin
    - Hawaiian English