

## **Course Outline for LING 425 (Historical Linguistics)**

**Content:** This course will provide you with an introduction to **HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS** -- the study of how languages change over time, of the changes that have occurred throughout the history of individual languages or language families, and of the historical “genetic” relations among languages with shared ancestry. In the first half of the course, we will examine sound change, borrowing and analogy, the three major types of change that underlie the comparative method of reconstructing proto-languages. In the second half, we will examine the comparative method itself and survey a number of other issues in historical linguistics, including the genetic classification of languages into historical families; models of linguistic change; language-internal reconstruction; semantic, lexical and syntactic change; explanations for linguistic change; proposals for distant genetic relationships; and the study of linguistic prehistory, with a particular focus on the Indo-European language family. In addition to a standard introductory textbook, we will read articles that focus on major contemporary issues in the field: the regularity of change, the transmission of change, and the establishment of remote genetic relations among languages.

**Instructional method and technology policy:** This class involves traditional teaching methods, including lectures (without PowerPoint) and class discussion, as well as document projections. **The course will not involve any online content or materials:** submission of written work and all non-classroom communication between students and the instructor will be exclusively by **email** (*not* myCourses). Emails will be sent to the addresses on the official class list; it is the student’s responsibility to make sure that they are received. Regular attendance in class and good note-taking are therefore encouraged, as is doing assigned readings before the class in which they will be discussed. Laptops and voice recorders are permitted in the classroom, but photography is not. Use of laptops and other electronic devices must be appropriate to and respectful of the classroom environment: recreational use of the internet during class is inappropriate and distracting for other students. Cell phones should be turned off and put away during class. If you do not think you can function well in this environment, you are strongly encouraged to choose a different course.

**Time/Place:** Monday/Wednesday, 11:35 a.m.-12:55 p.m., in ENGTR 2110 (room subject to change depending on class size and other factors).

**Instructor:** Prof. Charles Boberg. E-mail: [charles.boberg@mcgill.ca](mailto:charles.boberg@mcgill.ca). Office: 1085 Dr. Penfield, #223.

**Access to the instructor:** Please e-mail me if you have questions or concerns about the course or about other advising matters. If desired, an in-person meeting can be scheduled by e-mail. If you have brief comments or questions, you are encouraged to talk to me after class.

**Prerequisites:** LING 330 (Phonetics) and LING 320 (Sociolinguistics 1), or permission of instructor. As a 400-level class, Historical Linguistics involves advanced skills in linguistic analysis and a considerable amount of work. In particular, it assumes a solid understanding of

NB: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information). Also note that, per McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

phonetics and basic phonology (phonetic transcription, contrasting vs. complementary sound differences, phonetic features, natural classes of sounds, phonological rule writing, etc.) and builds on the basic principles of linguistic variation and change taught in LING 320. Students without this background may experience difficulty. Consult the instructor if you have any concerns about your level of preparation.

**Evaluation:** Homework exercises (1 @ 5% + 2 @ 10%) 25%  
Midterm exam 25% Final exam (cumulative) 50%

**Required textbook:** Lyle Campbell. 2013. *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Available free, as an eBook, through McGill Library. See course reserves at:

<https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/courseReserves/course/id/21303023>

Unfortunately this edition is now out of print. If you prefer a physical book, you can look for a used copy, or purchase the new 4<sup>th</sup> edition, which is similar in content but varies in organization and order of chapters. Lectures will follow the chapter order and content of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

**Other required readings:** the following articles are available in a course pack from the McGill Bookstore. If you prefer, you can look for electronic versions of them through McGill Library.

- Labov, William. 1981. Resolving the Neogrammarian controversy. *Language* 57: 267-308.
- Ross, Philip E. 1991. Hard words. *Scientific American* (April): 70-79.
- Wright, Robert. 1991. Quest for the mother tongue. *Atlantic Monthly* (April): 39-68.
- Labov, William. 2007. Transmission and diffusion. *Language* 83/2: 344-387.

**Policy on exercises:** either individual or group work and submissions are acceptable. Names of all group members should be clearly indicated on the submission and all group members will receive the same grade. Exercises must be submitted by **email** (to [charles.boberg@mcgill.ca](mailto:charles.boberg@mcgill.ca)), as a **Word or pdf attachment**, on the dates indicated below, by 11:59 pm (23:59). Starting at midnight, late submissions will be penalized 10% of the grade per day, including weekends. Extensions will not be granted except in cases of properly documented medical or other exceptional grounds, at the instructor's discretion.

**Midterm exam:** to be written in class on the day indicated below. Absences on the exam day (anticipated or unanticipated) should be discussed with the instructor as soon as possible. At the instructor's discretion, following discussion of the reason for the absence, a grade adjustment may be possible. In the case of absence on medical grounds, proper documentation of a suitably serious and unanticipated condition is required. Where the absence is not deemed excusable, a grade of zero will be awarded.

**Policy on attendance:** attendance in classes is not mandatory but is strongly encouraged, as students who do not attend regularly will miss important material, which may have a significant negative impact on their performance in the course. This includes classes in which assignments and exam results are reviewed. If you must be absent for medical or other serious and unavoidable reasons, upon presenting documentation of those reasons you may request an individual meeting in which the material you missed can be reviewed and discussed. If your

absence is not sufficiently justified, no accommodation will be offered, but students who were absent for an exam review may ask to see their exams briefly after a subsequent class.

**Policy on grades:** the grades assigned to assignments, papers and exams in this class are **not negotiable**. Students are encouraged to point out mathematical errors in grade calculation and are also welcome to request explanations of grades in cases where they do not understand the basis of the assessment, but requests for review and explanation aimed principally at negotiating for a higher grade (also known as “grade-grubbing”) will not be well received. Students should keep in mind that such requests reflect poorly on the student making them and are disrespectful of both the instructor and the other students in the class.

**Policy on fairness and accommodations:** it is crucially important that all students in this class be assessed and evaluated according to the same standard, as set forth in this course outline. Requests that special circumstances be taken into consideration in individual cases must therefore be assessed very carefully, as granting them may give one student an unfair advantage over others: without proper justification, a request for advantageous treatment of one student, such as a deadline extension, amounts to asking that all other students be put at an unfair disadvantage. Students with professionally diagnosed and ongoing medical or psychological conditions that require accommodation have recourse to the Student Accessibility and Achievement service (<https://www.mcgill.ca/access-achieve/>). In all other cases, any accommodations that are granted shall have the goal of restoring fairness in situations where it has been compromised by serious and unavoidable barriers or challenges faced by an individual student, such as an unanticipated medical condition or family trauma. Even in these situations, students are expected to act responsibly to mitigate the impact of the setback, as well as to communicate promptly, clearly and honestly with the instructor about their situation. Only requests judged by the instructor to be both valid and properly documented shall be granted and the nature of any accommodation offered shall be at the instructor’s discretion.

**Policy on cell phones and other electronic devices in relation to exams:** further to the general technology policy stated above, students are reminded of McGill’s policy, stated in its University Regulations and Resources, that, “As per the Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures, Article 17, cheating in any examination is considered a serious offence that could lead to expulsion from the University. Students are not permitted to have in their possession, or to use, any unauthorized materials during an examination. This includes electronic devices such as cell phones, iPods, MP3 players, PDAs, smart watches, and other web-access devices. Unauthorized items used during an exam will be reported to the Disciplinary Officer.” In this class, any student who consults a cell phone or other device during an exam will receive a grade of zero on the exam and be reported to the university authorities. Exams in this class are confidential. Any student who photographs an exam or is suspected of sharing copies or images of an exam with other students, or of receiving such copies or images, will be reported to the authorities.

**Policy on use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) applications:** the written work you submit in this class should represent your own research, thinking and writing. Using AI tools to produce written work limits your learning as a student and misrepresents the skills and achievements that are being assessed in this course. Inappropriate use of AI will be treated as a form of cheating and reported to the Disciplinary Officer.

**Tentative schedule** of lectures, readings, assignments and exams:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Lecture topic/Exam</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Evaluation</i>
08.28	W	Introduction: overview of course	Campbell Ch. 1	
09.02	M	No class: Labor Day		
09.04	W	Introduction, cont'd		
09.09	M	Sound change	Campbell Ch. 2	
09.11	W	Sound change, cont'd		
09.16	M	Sound change, cont'd		
09.18	W	Borrowing	Campbell Ch. 3	Exercise #1
09.23	M	Borrowing, cont'd		
09.25	W	Analogical change	Campbell Ch. 4	
09.30	M	Analogical change, cont'd		Exercise #2
10.02	W	Comparative method	Campbell Ch. 5	
10.07	M	Comparative method, cont'd		
10.09	W	<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b> (in-class)		<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>
10.14	M	No class: Fall Break		
10.16	W	No class: Fall Break		
10.21	M	Comparative method, cont'd, Midterm exam review		
10.23	W	Linguistic classification	Campbell Ch. 6	
10.28	M	Models of linguistic change	Campbell Ch. 7	Exercise #3
10.30	W	Models of ling. change, cont'd		
11.04	M	The Neogrammarian controversy	Labov 1981	
11.06	W	Internal reconstruction	Campbell Ch. 8	
11.11	M	Semantic & lexical change	Campbell Ch. 9	
11.13	W	Morph. & syntactic change	Campbell Ch. 10, 11	
11.18	M	Explaining linguistic change	Campbell Ch. 13	
11.20	W	Transmission and diffusion of change	Labov 2007	
11.25	M	Distant genetic relationship	Campbell Ch. 14, Ross, Wright	
11.27	W	Linguistic prehistory	Campbell Ch. 16	
12.02	M	Proto-Indo-European language & culture		
12.04	W	Pre-final exam review and/or extra lecture time, as needed		
TBA		<b>FINAL EXAM</b>		<b>FINAL EXAM</b>