



Historical Syntax & Lexical Change

How Sentence Structure and
Vocabulary Change over Time

Asian 401



Historical Syntax

- ◆ Syntax seems to change more slowly than phonology and morphology over time
- ◆ But if we look over many hundreds of years, we can see major differences



Basic Word Order

- ◆ Even basic word order can change over time
- ◆ S = Subject, V = Verb, O = Object
- ◆ SVO: English, Chinese
- ◆ SOV: Japanese, Korean, Hindi, Urdu
- ◆ VSO: Welsh, Tagalog
- ◆ OVS: Klingon (*not a real language*)



Example of VSO

- ◆ Welsh: “The man killed the dragon.”
- ◆ *Lladdodd y ddraig y dyn*
[ɭaðɔð i ðraig i dən]
killed the dragon the man
- ◆ Note: *ll* is a voiceless lateral fricative; *fl* is an Anglicized spelling (Lloyd = Floyd, from Welsh word ‘grey’)



Example of VSO

- ◆ Tagalog: “The child ate a mango.”
- ◆ Kumainang bata ng mangga
Ate child mango
- ◆ (*ang* and *ng* [nan] are case markers)



Changes in Word Order

- ◆ English has changed from SOV to SVO
- ◆ Old Eng. “When he visited the king ...”
- ◆ þa hēponecyning sōhte
when he the king visited...
- ◆ Cf. Modern English “man-eating tiger”
 - ◆ “Man-eating” is an OV structure



Changes in Word Order

- ◆ Nearly all Sino-Tibetan languages are SOV
- ◆ But the Chinese languages have changed to SVO
- ◆ The Karen languages (spoken in Thailand and Burma) have also changed to SVO



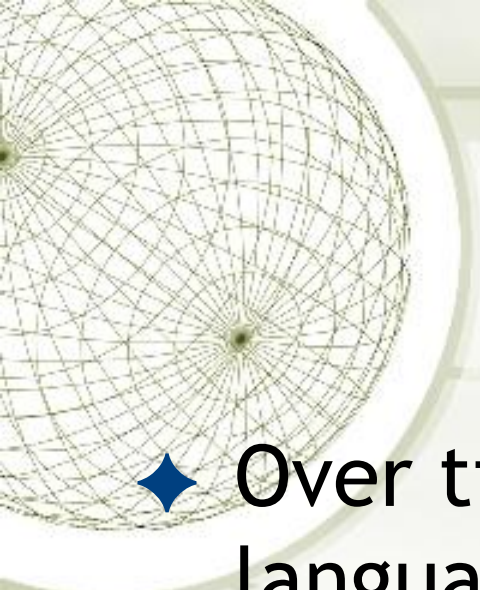
Other Changes in Syntax

- ◆ Reanalysis and the Chinese copula
 - ◆ Classical Chinese had no verb ‘to be’
 - ◆ Copular sentences basically looked like “A B” (meaning “A is B”)
 - ◆ A common sentence was “A, *shì* B” meaning “As for A, *this* is B”
 - ◆ *shì* was reanalyzed by speakers as a copula -- it is the Mandarin copula today



Other Changes in Syntax

- ◆ If you've ever studied a Classical Language (Chinese, Japanese, Sanskrit, Arabic, Greek, etc.) then you know that the syntax can be radically different from the modern forms of those languages
- ◆ Nearly any aspect of syntax can change!



Lexical Change

- ◆ Over time, the vocabulary of a language changes
- ◆ The set of lexemes (words) shifts
- ◆ Old words disappear, new words are added
- ◆ Example: English *spectacles*, *glasses*
- ◆ Word meanings also shift over time



Obsolescence

- ◆ Why does an old word disappear?
- ◆ The thing referred to may no longer exist or be important in the society
- ◆ A new word with a similar meaning may replace it
- ◆ Sometimes there is no obvious reason



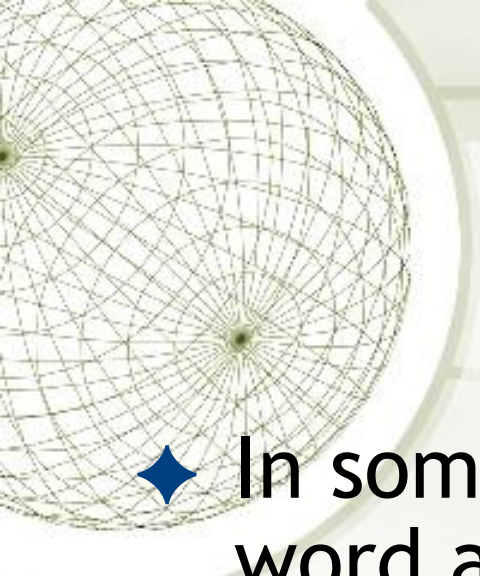
Innovation

- ◆ Where do new words come from?
- ◆ *Derivation from existing morphemes*
- ◆ *English: Greek and Latin roots;
Hindi: Sanskrit roots; Urdu: Arabic roots*
- ◆ *Borrowings from other languages*
- ◆ *Other processes (blends, acronyms, etc.)*



Borrowing

- ◆ Borrowed words can radically change the vocabulary [and phonology!] of a language in a short time
- ◆ Japanese has had two massive borrowings: Chinese words (8th-12th centuries) and English words (20th-21st centuries)



Japanese Borrowing

- ◆ In some cases an original Japanese word and an English borrowing co-exist
- ◆ One may become obsolete, or the meaning of one or the other may shift
- ◆ Example: “enjoy”
- ◆ *tanosimu* *entfo:i-suru*



Korean Borrowing

- ◆ Korean has fewer English borrowings than Japanese does
- ◆ But just as many Chinese borrowings
- ◆ Consider this triplet for ‘meeting’:
 - ◆ *moim* native Korean
 - ◆ *hwεhap* Chinese borrowing
 - ◆ *mit^hin* English borrowing



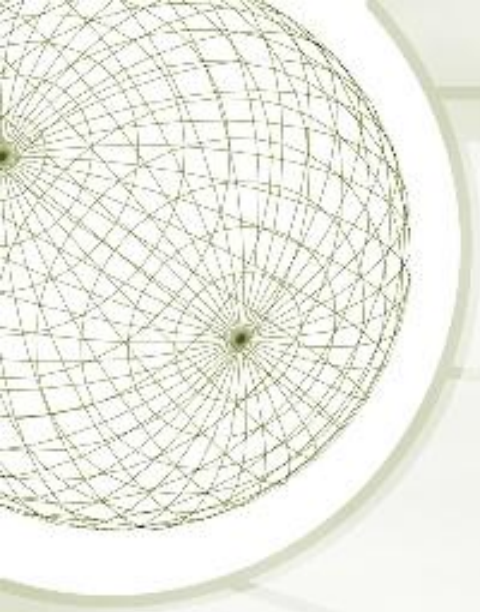
Korean Borrowing

- ◆ Sometimes borrowings fill a gap in the native lexicon
- ◆ Korean has a number of words for ‘wife’, but they all carry a particular connotation (e.g. humble, respectful)
- ◆ Recently the English word ‘wife’ has been borrowed as *waipw*. It has a more neutral meaning.



Borrowing in Asian Languages

- ◆ There are many more examples of borrowing in the *LESA* textbook.



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