

**PAPER 7 (HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS)  
INTERNAL RECONSTRUCTION**

Internal reconstruction is exactly the same as morphemic analysis, but the emphasis of the two is different. Morphemic analysis brushes aside unproductive irregular alternations, whereas internal reconstruction concentrates on them. In traditional historical linguistics the technique known as internal reconstruction is complementary to the comparative method for studying the earlier forms of languages.

Basically internal reconstruction involves comparing forms within a single language, if they give any indication regarding an earlier state of that language. In present day linguistics, much of what has previously been subsumed under internal reconstruction is taken over by descriptive linguistics, specifically under the heading of morphophonemic analysis. Nonetheless, from historical point of view internal reconstruction remains a valid device for getting at earlier stages of languages.

A noted Indo-Europeanist, Grassman, discovered this method and gave its noted example in the nineteenth century. Certain Indo-European correspondence sets were causing difficulty in that they seemed not to fit in with previously established patterns. Grassman examined the data in Greek and Sanskrit and was able to show that developments peculiar to these languages resulted in the apparent irregularities. Let us consider the Greek forms

- (1) (a) trikh - o 'I walk'.            (b) thrik -s- o 'I will walk'.  
(2) (a) thrik - s 'hair'                (b) trikh -os 'of the hair'.

First we note that in each of the above forms only aspirated consonants occur, but this varies in each of the two sets. In 1 (a) and 2 (b) we have a /kh/ and in 1(b) and 2 (a) we have a /th/. In other words, in these paradigms we have aspirated consonants (kh and th) altering with unaspirated (t, k) and this gives us different forms of the stem (trikhs, thrik, thrik -, thrik-, trikh-).

Internal reconstruction is based on a principle that alternations such as these in a language were at some previous stages not present, and the current situation is due to specific sound changes. From the above forms, Grassman was able to deduce that in Pre-Greek the original stems were

threkh-  
thrick-

Greek then underwent two sound changes. The first of these removed the aspiration from the consonant when it was followed by s; the second deaspirated a consonant when it was followed by another aspirated consonant in the same stem.

1. ch - c/ - s
2. ch - c/ - ..ch

By applying these two rules to Pre-Greek forms, we can account for what appears in the attested words.

As it turned out, the Pre-Greek forms thus reached by Grassman were precisely those needed to deal with the Indo-European problem at hand. The second rule, above, that two aspirated consonants may not occur in the same stem, will also be applied in Sanskrit and came to be known as Grassman's law.

When we reconstruct forms and posit sound laws to account for alternations in a single language, we have to guarantee that these forms actually existed at a previous

stage of the language. The alternations might have been present for an indefinitely long time, or other irrecoverable sound changes might have taken place - Grassman's internal reconstruction was accepted because the earlier forms he posited could be verified by comparison with other languages.

The process of discovering and describing the elements and rules of the common language is known as reconstruction. And the method by which this is done in most cases is called the comparative method since it involves comparing different language systems.

The internal reconstruction is one of the methods which helps in reconstruction the former stages of a language. The method of internal reconstruction is surely limited one since it employs data from only one language that are often incomplete and difficult to interpret. Briefly the method requires us to inspect a language for any peculiarities of phonological and grammatical distribution that might be explained by known process of change. For instance, we may find no occurrence of [k] before [i] except in words obviously borrowed from other languages. But instances of all other consonants including [c] before [i] are in native words. There might also be no instance of [c] after vowels. The hypothesis is that such variations did not exist at some previous time in the language. We therefore postulate that at one time [k] did occur before [i] but that palatalization - a process by which front vowel affects a preceding consonant - produced a shift of [k] to [c] before [i]. The English words children and cold provides examples in which palatalization occurred in the first word (children) but not in the second (cold) where the original beginning consonants were [k].

The relationships between consonants and vowels and stems and affixes in pair of words such as 'same-sanity', 'weep-wept', 'wise-wisdom', 'lose-lost', and 'holy-holiday' enable us to postulate the existence of a previous stage of the language in which each pair of words contained the same vowel [ , e, i, o, ] respectively. We can point to processes such as diphthongization, vowel shortening, and vowel raising to account for the currently observed differences.

An obvious connexion exists between the method of internal reconstruction and certain kinds of investigations into morphology and into generative phonology. The results are often remarkably similar. The method varies in usefulness with the kind of data that are involved, for though it is valuable in certain kinds of phonological and morphological work, it is almost useless in syntactic studies. The method is also of little use in establishing relationships among languages except for the help it provides in reconstructing earlier stages of the individual languages among which any relationships must be sought.

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