



**Department of Spanish Studies, General Linguistics and Literature Theory  
University of Alicante**

*Undergraduate level*

**LINGUISTICS 8806**

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**Task Sheet 20**

**Academic year: 2009-2010**

**PART II. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF LINGUISTICS**

**KEY TOPIC(S):**

- **Nineteenth-century linguistics: Historical linguistics.**

**READING ASSIGNMENT 10**

The purpose of this reading assignment is to help you to become aware of language change; that is, what kind of changes occur (and why) and equally important, what kinds of changes don't occur (and why not); and the relationship of languages historically.

**PAIR DISCUSSION – Working in pairs, answer the questions that follow.**

- 1.** In Reading assignment 9, we discussed how Philosophy and Grammar were closely related among the scholars of Ancient Greece and Rome. What discipline was closely related to the study of language in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Linguistics?
- 2.** Read the following text carefully (published in *Asiatic Researches* in 1788) and answer the questions as stated below.

The *Sanscrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin*, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could not possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologist could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source which, perhaps, no longer exists; there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the *Gothick* and the *Celtick*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the *Sanscrit*, and the old *Persian* might be added to the same family, if this were the place for discussing any question concerning the antiquities of *Persia*. (Jones [1788] 1807, iii, 34).



What did Sir William Jones suggest in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century?

What importance do you think Jones' "discovery" had for the development of language study in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

**3.** What is the Proto-Indo-European language and why were comparative linguists so interested in its study?

**4.** What for and why did 19<sup>th</sup> century linguists use the terms *mother* (or *parent*), *daughter*, and *sister* when referring to the Family Tree Theory?



**5.** Explain the advantages and disadvantages of the **Family Tree Theory**.

**6.** Explain the advantages and disadvantages of the **Wave Theory**.



**7.** Is it possible that languages show linguistic similarities without necessarily being related? Explain, using your own words.

**8.** What two tendencies made it possible to determine language relationships in the Comparative Method? Explain both of them briefly.

Why are both tendencies so important?



**9.** What is a *cognate* of a word? Give an example.

**10.** Summarise the four different steps of the Comparative Method Procedure.



**11.** Who was Jakob Grimm and what is the **Grimm's Law**?

**12.** Write your reaction to the usefulness of this reading assignment. Also, comment on what you learned about modern linguistics as a result of this assessment.