

## Times of change

In historical reconstruction, linguistic history traditionally takes the form of relative chronologies of change events. The absolute dating of long-past events is beyond the power of conventional methods (i.e., comparative reconstruction). However, for all kinds of purposes one would like to be able to put dates to events and states, in linguistic and other (pre-)history, and therefore non-conventional methods such as glottochronology, in its old and modern manifestations, have been such a temptation. The challenge is to somehow figure out how long, in diachronic real-time (measured in generations), states of non-change must have lasted and how long changes from one state to another must have taken. Hence the renewed recent interest in the time-stability of linguistic forms and constructions.

The aim of this paper is to survey recent work on the diachronic pertinacity or transience of syntax -- syntax in relation to other parts of grammar and lexicon, and different parts of syntax in relation to one another. Much of this work is inferential: that is, from synchronic comparison within and across families, differential stabilities are inferred -- the more variable, the less stable. On the face of it this does not seem implausible; but there are problems. One kind of problem to be discussed is that transitions from identical beginning and end states can be effectuated in different ways, and the corresponding temporal profiles can be quite different.