History and historical linguistics:
two types of cognitive reconstruction?

Patrick Honeybone
University of Edinburgh

Abstract
This article compares principles and practice in history and (structural) historical linguistics. I argue that the disciplines can be both connected and distinguished by the recognition that they engage in acts of cognitive reconstruction. I show that such reconstruction is fundamental to both disciplines, but that they do it differently: historical linguistics reconstructs unconscious entities, while history reconstructs at the conscious level. For these arguments to go through, certain commitments are required from the disciplines' philosophies: mentalism of the type associated with Chomsky's linguistics, and idealism of the type associated with Collingwood's history. Although cognitive reconstruction is important to both areas of study, it is not all they do: to provide the context for my arguments, I also consider a number of other connections and distinctions between the disciplines, in terms of the questions that they can ask, the evidence available to them, and their relationships to synchrony and diachrony.

1. Introduction

The academic disciplines of history and historical linguistics clearly have some things in common – they both deal with aspects of the past, after all. There is also much that differentiates them, however, in their aims and methodologies, and in their intellectual context and traditions. In this article I argue that we should recognise one particular point which both connects *and* distinguishes the disciplines, in ways which are not commonly discussed (and I consider a few other things which link or differentiate them, too).[1] The main point has to do with the very nature of their objects of enquiry, and it will require us to entertain a set of controversial but compelling assumptions about the philosophy of the disciplines. The article can be seen as a contribution to the comparative philosophy of disciplines, and its main aim is to help us better understand what it is that we do when we do historical linguistics and/or history (or, at least, central parts of them), and also in what it is that we *don't*.

I do not compare *everything* that historical linguists and historians do here, nor everything that they are interested in. Rather, in seeking to answer the fundamental questions '*what is the object of study in history?*' and '*what is the object of study in historical linguistics?*' I argue that certain fundamental aims in the two disciplines allow us to remove the question mark in the title to this piece: history and historical

---

[1] For discussion of these ideas, I would like to thank Nils Langer, Michael and Diana Honeybone, and the audiences at the *Workshop on History and Linguistics, Linguistics and Historiography* at the University of Bristol in 2008, and at a talk in the *Language and History Interdisciplinary Seminar* at the University of Oxford in 2009. I would also like to thank two anonymous reviewers for comments on a draft of this article. Any errors remaining are, of course, my own.

linguistics *do* engage in two – interestingly connected, but also quite different – types of cognitive reconstruction.

In section 2, I consider a number of basic connections and differences between the two disciplines that are our focus; these are mostly beyond the main topic under consideration here, but they provide a context for the discussion in sections 3, 4 and 5. These latter sections consider historical linguistics and history in the light of the idea proposed in the article's title: section 3 focuses on historical linguistics, and section 4 on history. Section 5 concludes.

2. History and historical linguistics: parallels and differences

One obvious difference between historical linguistics and history is that historical linguistics is a subdiscipline, or branch, of a larger area of study: linguistics. 'History' is equivalent to 'linguistics' as a superordinate disciplinary term, which itself has second-level subfields, such as social history and political history. Certain characteristics of historical linguistics are inherited due to it being a 'type of linguistics', so some of what follows compares aspects of history with aspects of general linguistics.[2] With this in mind, we can recognise a basic difference in the two fields' terminologies: for linguistics, there is a handy distinction between (1a) and (1b), whereas the equivalent is absent for history, as (2a) and (2b) show.

(1a)   the name of the discipline: *linguistics*
(1b)   the discipline's object of study: *language*

(2a)   the name of the discipline: *history$_1$*
(2b)   the discipline's object of study: *history$_2$*

It could be claimed that (2b) should be 'the past', but there are reasons to reject this: history$_1$ typically requires human agency (or even written records) for its subject matter to count, something considered in some detail in section 4. To be of interest to history$_1$, these acts of human agency need to have occurred in the past, but that is not the same as simply *being* the past. The term 'history' is thus ambiguous (an obvious point, long made by others writing on the nature of history, such as Carr 1961), and as it is important to be clear about the terms used in a piece such as this, it might sometimes help to have the subscriptal distinction in (2). I use this in the current section, but – rather than cluttering the whole article with subscripts – I adopt the convention in later sections that, if no subscript is given, then 'history' should be taken to mean history$_1$ (as has been implicit up till now).

---

[2] As Lass (1997: 27) has it: "The primary constraint on a historical subject is its non-historical metasubject. Historical biology is part of biology, and hence constrained by biological knowledge and theory; historical linguistics is a branch of linguistics, constrained by non-historical linguistic knowledge and theory." We will see below (in sections 2.1 and 3) how constraints developed in general linguistics can play a role in historical linguistics. Incidentally, history, as a metasubject, is unusual in not having a historical sub-subject – there is historical sociology, historical geography and historical anthropology, for example – but, perhaps because we need to avoid going round in circles, there is no historical history (there is 'the history of history', but that's a different matter). This could be seen as a further difference between the two disciplines in question here. On the other hand, historians do have the useful term *historiography*, to refer to the study of the writing of history as an academic discipline. There is no equivalent *linguisticography*, but this is simply a lexical gap, as the linguistic equivalent has long been studied. If we were to fill the gap, this article might even be described as a contribution to comparative *historiography* and *linguisticography*.

It might seem reasonable to expect 'historical linguistics' to be an interdisciplinary branch of enquiry existing in the overlap between $history_1$ and linguistics. This is not, however, where much of historical linguistics lies. Considerable work in historical linguistics deals with autonomously linguistic structural entities ('autonomous' in the sense of Newmeyer 1986, for example), such as phonological segments and syntactic categories, and these entities are not subject to the conscious human will that $history_1$ considers. This is not to say that no part of historical linguistics overlaps with $history_1$ – some parts of it certainly do, and there *is* an intersecting area of study where precisely the same questions can be asked. It may well be that this is where much of 'historical sociolinguistics' lies (the fact that such work is also known as 'the social history of language' – as in Burke 2004 – corroborates this idea). Historical linguistics is thus not a unitary (sub)discipline, because it groups together any aspect of anything which connects language or language use with $history_2$.

Questions which need both historical and linguistic investigation include such basic issues as: *how does the standardisation of languages occur?* There are clearly linguistic issues involved in standardisation, but we also need to understand the social relations and context which motivated the individuals who enacted the process, and this requires historical methods. Specific questions which exist in the disciplinary overlap might include: *what role did the idea that there was a Czech language play in political developments in the Central Europe?* and *what impact did this have on the Slavic dialect(s) spoken there?* (see, for example, Törnquist-Plewa 2000, Evans 1998) or *what were the demographics of the people involved in the early colonisation of New Zealand?* and *how did this lead to the formation of the 'new-dialect' of New Zealand English?* (see, for example, Trudgill 2004). Such questions can all be part of historical linguistics, but they are not the kinds of questions considered in this article. I focus here (mostly in section 3) on issues of autonomous linguistic structure which are primarily or only of interest to linguists.

With this restriction, we can identify a number of parallels between $history_1$ and (at least the structural part of) historical linguistics. One seems obvious, so much so that we have noted it already: both are connected with aspects of (actions from, states that existed in) the past, as spelt out in (3).

(3a) $history_1$ aims to understand past actions
(3b)   historical linguistics aims to understand past linguistic systems

There are two reasons why this is not in fact as obvious as it seems: (i) it requires us to reject the postmodern approach to $history_1$, and (ii) it requires us to tease apart the synchronic and diachronic approach to the study of the past.

Postmodernism is a contentious and complex philosophical current in $history_1$ (see, for example, O'Brian 2001 and Munslow 2001), as in many other fields. Some historians (such as Jenkins 1991 and Munslow 2001) avowedly subscribe to it, to argue, contrary to (3a), that we cannot ever rediscover or, therefore, truly understand $history_2$. Postmodern history ties in with the general postmodernist distrust that anything could ever be objectively true, or that we can ever understand the thoughts of anyone other than ourselves, arguing that we are tied to our own contemporary linguistically-determined world-view. This means, the claim goes, that $history_1$ just tells possible tales about $history_2$, and other tales are always just as reasonable (for example, Munslow 2001 writes that "[m]y history is just another cultural practice that studies cultural practice").

The approach that I consider here requires us to reject postmodern doubt, and to

assume that we are indeed able to understand history$_2$ in terms of how it actually *was* (following, for example, Evans 1998 and O'Brien 2001), just as we can hope to understand the truth about physics and medicine. It is noteworthy that postmodernism has not been influential in linguistics (as it is generally conceived) – another difference between the two disciplines.[3] Perhaps this is because many linguists view linguistics as more of a science than a humanity (and postmodernism has found no place in science), but it may also be that the very existence of historical semantics and etymology – one branch of linguistics – contradicts or conflicts with postmodern tenets. The argument from etymology is that we *are* able to recover the meaning of words from the past, with some painstaking work, and hence we *can* understand what others mean, or meant. In its own way, this point flags up a further connection between historical linguistics and history$_1$ – the latter relies on the former to some degree, because historians *do* need to rely on a firm reconstruction of the meaning of the texts that they work with if they are to escape the postmodern current. Thanks to postmodernist arguments, historians are more conscious of the significance of language to historical study (taking a 'linguistic turn'), but while we know that words can change their meaning – an example of this is given in (11), below – an awareness of the results of etymology (along with a judicious use of materials such as dictionaries which are contemporary with the texts that are being studied) allows us to reject the postmodern position, as is necessary for the argument to be made below to go through.

For (3) to make sense, we also need to tease apart synchrony and diachrony. This distinction is inescapable in linguistics following its description in Saussure (1916), a fundamental text for twentieth century linguistics. A synchronic approach focuses on a particular system at one point in time, whereas a diachronic approach focuses on the changes that occur between chronologically successive instantiations of one particular system. This is quite straightforward in principle: it was recognised by linguists before Saussure named it, and the same distinction is made in other historical disciplines, even if under different names (for example, Warkentin 2009 talks of the 'horizontal approach' – that is, synchrony – and the 'vertical approach' – diachrony – in historical geography).

A naïve view of historical linguistics and history$_1$ might expect both to be purely diachronic disciplines (for example, Pei 1965 writes "[a] term often used as a synonym for historical linguistics is diachronic linguistics"), but for (3a) and (3b) to hold, they must study synchrony: a particular action can only occur at one specific point in history$_2$, and past linguistic systems exist at specific points in history$_2$. In fact, historical linguistics and history$_1$ can and do focus on both diachrony and synchrony: for example, we might synchronically study the society or politics of the kingdom of Prussia in the middle of the nineteenth-century, or we might study the diachrony of the changing organisation of the German states during the nineteenth-century; or we might synchronically study the phonology of mid-fifteenth-century Middle English, or the diachrony of the changes in the tense vowel system of English from the end of the Middle English period to the start of Late Modern English. The synchrony/diachrony distinction will prove important below.

---

[3] Rather oddly, some postmodern philosophers claim that they are doing linguistics, or at least are interacting with the concepts that linguistics deals with (e.g., Derrida 1967), or that linguistics was fundamental in the pathway of postmodernist ideas, through the development of structuralism. For a clear explanation of the bafflement that this causes in linguists, see Dresher (1999), and for a demolition of some of the small amount of work in (applied) linguistics which *has* been influenced by postmodern ideas, see Borsley (2000).

We can recognise one further parallel between historical and historical linguistic method, if only because it flags up one way in which the two disciplines are similar (even if the terminology used in this area hides this). This is pointed out in (4).

(4a)   the historical linguist uses both *direct* and *indirect evidence*
(4b)   the historian uses both *witting* and *unwitting testimony*

The observations in (4) describe two types of sources available in the two disciplines. The distinction in (4a) is analogous to that in (4b), and it is implicit in (4) that both disciplines are limited in similar ways by the evidence that is available to them. If we take historical phonology as an example of work in historical linguistics, the two parts of (4a) can be explained as follows: in order to do historical phonology, we need to know how past phonological systems worked (which sounds they used, how they were organised, *etc*.). Direct evidence for this includes overt comments on pronunciation from past orthoepists and spelling reformers (such as Hart 1569, who devised his own phonetic alphabets to better represent English phonology); they needed to explicitly describe how people spoke in the sixteenth century in order to be able to write about what they wanted. Indirect evidence for historical phonology includes the consideration of spellings in documents from the past, and of rhymes and puns from past linguistic states, none of which was intended to provide special evidence about phonology (see, for example, Dobson 1968, Jones 1989 and Lass to appear). Marwick (2001a, b) explains the (4b) distinction used in history$_1$, writing: " 'Witting' means 'deliberate' or 'intentional'; 'unwitting' means 'unaware' or 'unintentional'. 'Testimony' means 'evidence'. Thus, 'witting testimony' is the deliberate or intentional message of a document or other source; the 'unwitting testimony' is the unintentional evidence (about, for example, the attitudes and values of the author, or about the 'culture' to which he/she belongs) that it also contains." The parallel in (4) is that both disciplines consider a range of types of sources, which require parallel types of interpretative skill: some aspects of these sources aim to tell the reader something, and are hidden until research reveals them.

2.1 How can *cognitive reconstruction* be relevant?
In order to show that history and historical linguistics are linked through cognitive reconstruction, we need to establish why we should want to discuss cognitive states at all. The distinctions made in (1) and (2) are worded as if they were very simple; like most things, though, they are not. The claim that cognitive reconstruction is involved in both branches of study derives from positions that have been developed in the disciplines' philosophies concerning the true nature of (1b) and (2b) – of their objects of study. They are set out in (5) and (6).

(5)   in history$_1$: the 'idealist' position (eg, Collingwood 1946)
      = the aim of history$_1$ is to rethink the thoughts of people from the past

(6)   in linguistics: the 'mentalist' orientation (eg, Chomsky 1965)
      = language exists in the minds of speakers

The claims in (5) and (6) both link their respective areas of study to the cognitive realm, and will be crucial to the central argument in this article. They are bold and controversial claims, and I explain their bases in sections 3 and 4. In order to do that, one final connection between the two disciplines needs to be recognised:

(7)   both historical linguistics and history$_1$ rely on cognitive uniformitarianism

   The assumption in (7) is that humans and the human mind have been qualitatively the same throughout history, so that the fundamental nature of the language that is investigated in historical linguistics and the thoughts that are considered in history$_1$ have always been the same. The essential assumption is that both history$_1$ and historical linguistics can only consider the history$_2$ of modern humans and would not seek to consider anything beyond that (thus D'Oro 2006 writes that "[i]n ordinary usage *history* tends to be identified not with natural history but with the history of human affairs"). If we assume that the brain has not evolved since the development of modern humans somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 years ago, we can reasonably adopt a uniformitarian position on the mind: the ways in which our brains allow us to think have not changed, so uniformitarianism is realistic in history$_1$, and as language is uncontroversially enabled in some way by what is in our minds (for Chomsky it is constrained by Universal Grammar which guides the acquisition of language), uniformitarianism in historical linguistics is reasonable, too.
   As Lass (1997: 28) shows, by quoting Whitney (1867: 24), a basic, non-cognitive uniformitarianism has been adopted by some in historical linguistics since at least the late nineteenth-century, when it was in its prime:

> The nature and uses of speech [...] cannot but have been essentially the same during all periods of its history [...] there is no way in which its unknown past can be investigated, except by the careful study of its living present and recorded past, and the extension and application to remote conditions of laws and principles deduced by that study.

   This practically spells out general uniformitarianism, which was first established in geology: the principles governing the world were the same in the past as they are today, and if we establish the principles that govern an object of enquiry by considering how it works in the present (or perhaps also, at Whitney says, in parts of the past that we understand well), we can restrict our ideas about how that object could have been in the parts of past that we need to understand. For our purposes, uniformitarianism means that (i) we should not allow for any kind of language during history$_2$ which violates the linguistic principles that we have come to understand through our intuition- and corpus-based investigation of contemporary languages, and that (ii) we can assume that human actions and thoughts during history$_2$ were produced on the basis of the same kinds of thoughts and impulses that we humans have today, which area available for investigation. If the claims in (5) and (6) are right, cognitive uniformitarianism is an important methodological guide.
   Understood this way, both history$_1$ and historical linguistics are interested in things which existed in peoples' minds during history$_2$. The claim that both disciplines involve cognitive reconstruction is thus beginning to become clear. To justify it fully, we need to consider what it is that historical linguists and historians do. I turn to this in the next two sections.

3. What do historical linguists do?
In order to make my case, I need to show that there is an aim in (at least part of) both historical linguistics and history[4] to carry out cognitive reconstruction. The argument is easier to make, and more widely accepted in historical linguistics. I explain its basis

---

[4] From now on, unless otherwise indicated, 'history' = 'history$_1$'.

here.

Two commitments from the philosophy of the discipline are needed to make the case. These are (i) the fundamental orientation towards mentalism in linguistics, mentioned in (6), and (ii) a commitment from historical linguistics concerning the status of the results of historical linguists' work: we must be able to give them a *realist*, and not *formulist* interpretation. I explain both of these briefly below: the assumption of mentalism immediately, and the requirement of realism in section 3.1.

The claim in (6) is that the object of study in linguistics is a mental, or cognitive, object. This is not uncontroversial, but we cannot consider all the arguments that have been had about the nature of language here; what is important, and is obvious to all, is that humans have knowledge of language stored in their minds – it is not contentious to say that we need to involve the cognitive realm when we speak. The idea that language is a cognitive entity is often associated with the 'ideal speaker-hearer' approach of generativism, one of the mainstream positions in linguistics (although not all aspects of the generative approach need be adopted for my fundamental claim to be accepted). From within this tradition, Chomsky has long argued that we need to recognise a distinction between 'language' and 'the use of language'. This is essentially the same distinction that Saussure (1916) proposed between 'langue' and 'parole', so it has long roots. Building on an early (1965) distinction between *competence* and *performance*, Chomsky (1986) discusses a distinction between *I-Language* and *E-Language*. I-Language is an aspect of *knowledge* – it is the set of linguistic generalisations that we know in order to be able to speak our language (or languages). For example, we know that in English, the regular plural is formed by adding an alveolar fricative which takes its voicing from the final segment in the word that it attaches to (so we say [kats] *cats* but [kabz] *cabs*), and we know that *wh*-phrases like *what* and *how many* occur at the start of clauses in questions. Like all types of knowledge, I-language is *i*-nternal to each *i*-ndividual. It is the grammar that exists in the mind/brain of speakers. 'E-language' refers to the utterances that speakers make when they talk or write. This connects with everything else that the 'everyday sense' of *language* involves, including everything connected to language which is *e*-xternal to the speaker, such as the communities that they belong to.

The standard generative opinion is that linguists who aim to understand such purely (autonomously) linguistic generalisations about phonology, syntax and similar aspects of language should focus on I-language. E-language is subject to influence from many different areas: physical pressures affecting linguistic performance, social and political pressures affecting interactions, and historical contingency in terms of what speakers happen to talk about. The claim is that the set of utterances that speakers make is not a well-formed or coherent object, and it is not enough if we hope to discover the generative system that constitutes the language. We cannot wait for occurrences of everything that is possible in a language in corpora of utterances, and they cannot tell us what is impossible in a language, so E-language is not the right object of study if we aim to figure out the generative system that a speaker knows. This is not to say that E-language is uninteresting or unworthy of study: the sociology and history of languages and the interactions and perceptions of their speakers are major objects of study which we need in order to understand the human condition; corpus linguistics has told us a lot about collocation and frequency, but these things are facts about how speakers *use* their language, not about language itself.

Mentalism need not be stripped of all aspects of linguistic variation, however (as it often is in generative approaches). In order to use their language appropriately, speakers need to *know* about the types of variation that the members of their speech

community engage in, so this must be part of their knowledge about language – perhaps not precisely the same kind of knowledge that we have about purely structural linguistic, but it, too, points in the direction of mentalism for linguistics. The mentalist case that 'language' exists in the minds of speakers, as I-linguistic states of knowledge, has been clearly made in mainstream branches of linguistics. It gives linguists of a structural bent a coherent object of study, and I adopt it here.

3.1 Does historical linguistics involve cognitive reconstruction?

We have seen that is it reasonable to claim that language is a cognitive entity. The case that historical linguistics engages in cognitive reconstruction is now not that difficult to argue. If language exists in the mind, and if one of the things that historical linguists do is to try to work out the structure of past synchronic linguistic states, then historical linguistics engages in cognitive reconstruction. In this section, I consider the ways in which historical linguists try to work out the structure of past synchronic linguistic states, and then I turn to issues that some linguists raise concerning the status of the reconstructions that are done in the discipline.

One of the earliest and greatest achievements of historical linguistics was the proof that many currently existing languages are 'genetically' related to each other – that they derive in some real sense from the same ancestor proto-language. For example, we know that most of the languages spoken in Europe (and the countries to which they have been colonially exported in the past few centuries), and many spoken in Asia are derived from Proto-Indo-European (PIE). One of the central aims in nineteenth-century linguistics was to reconstruct proto-languages, especially PIE, about whose daughter languages much is known, and work on PIE continues today. The great tool for such work is the comparative method of reconstruction, in which forms for a particular linguistic feature are compared in related languages, to establish correspondences of form, which are then considered together to establish what is the most likely ancestral form from which they all could have derived (for a full description of the method, see Fox 1995). These forms are taken to be the reconstructed linguistic features of the proto-language.

A classic example is the reconstruction of the PIE stop system. Although most European languages have two series of stops – often transcribed as /p, t, k/ *vs* /b, d, g/ – we can be sure that PIE had three series, thanks to the evidence of languages like Sanskrit and Greek, which preserve multiple stop series. Also, we know that one of the series of PIE stops became fricatives in Proto-Germanic, so that contemporary English *three*, with an initial fricative, corresponds with Ancient Greek *treis*, Latin *tres*, Old Church Slavonic *trije* and Old Irish *tri*, for example, which all have stops (nominative masculine forms for *three* given here where the number declines in a language). To summarise some of this, (8) shows in its final column the classic reconstruction of the three series of PIE stops (with the coronal stop standing for the full series), which have been reconstructed on the basis of the oldest attested forms including those given in the other columns (taken from Job 1989). 'OCS' stands for Old Church Slavonic, the oldest attested Slavic language, 'Vedic' is a form of Sanskrit, and Gothic represents the Germanic languages, such as English, so it has a fricative (as in *three*) corresponding to stops in the other languages. The overwhelming preponderance of stops in non-Germanic languages shows that the PIE reconstruction of a stop is on firm ground.

(8)

Avestan	Vedic	Greek	Latin	Old Irish	Gothic	OCS	*PIE*
t	t	t	t	t	θ	t	t
d	d	d	d	d	t	d	d
d	d^h	t^h	f	d	d	d	d^h

The forms in the last column in (8) are an attempt to reconstruct the stop system of a language for which we have no records. Given that it was argued above that the only coherent locus to situate a language, in its technical sense, is in the minds of its speakers, this means that what is shown here is an attempt at cognitive reconstruction – a reconstruction of something that existed at some synchronic point in the minds of the speakers of PIE.

Two points should be raised here. Firstly, it is common practice in historical linguistics to indicate forms which have been reconstructed in this way with an asterisk, to contrast them with forms which are attested in written documents and the like. This means that PIE /t/ is commonly represented as *t, for example. I do not adopt this practice here because all the forms given in (8) are reconstructed in some way, as discussed below, so the status of the PIE form is not fundamentally different from the other forms in (8). Secondly, we should note that the classic reconstruction of PIE stops has been subject to considerable challenge. It is not in doubt that there were three series of stops, but linguists have argued at length about the precise way in which they should be reconstructed. The best known alternative reconstruction is the 'Glottalic Theory' of Gamkrelidze & Ivanov (1973), which can be seen as contending that rather than voiceless/plain, voiced and voiced aspirated series, there were voiceless aspirated, ejective and voiced aspirated series. Proposals such as the Glottalic Theory have been made for a number of reasons, in part centring around the idea that the classic reconstruction is typologically highly unlikely, because we do not expect to find languages with a breathy voiced ('voiced aspirated') series, like /d^h/ if they do not also have a voiceless aspirated series, like /t^h/; that is, the uniformitarianism of (7) is applied. Far from casting doubt on the assumption that the final column in (8) *is* a case cognitive reconstruction, however, the fact that linguists argue about the best way to reconstruct a language shows that they care about getting the cognitive reconstruction right. The uniformitarian constraints of general linguistics on what is a possible language only apply to a reconstructed language if the reconstruction is taken to be psychologically real.

By PIE, then, we mean the I-linguistic grammar that a speaker of PIE had. In the same way, when historical linguists work to figure out any aspect of an attested language such as Old English (OE), they are trying to reconstruct the mental grammar of speakers of OE (at a particular point in its development, such as classical West Saxon). It may be that in certain cases we can never be successful in reconstructing *complete* past I-languages – if evidence in a particular case is scant, for example – but we can still hope to reconstruct at least parts of past languages fully, such as the plosive or fricative system of the language, or its nominal morphology, and these parts were mental (sub)systems in their own right.

To consider an example of synchronic cognitive reconstruction from OE, we know from a range of types of evidence that OE had essentially only one series of fricatives, of the type /f, θ, s/; there were no voiced fricatives of the type /v, ð, z/. We also know that OE fricatives were subject to a phonological process of intersonorant voicing. To exemplify with the labial-dentals, this means that the fricatives in *fisc* 'fish' and *wulf* 'wolf' were voiceless [f] on the surface, but that those in *wulfas* 'wolves' and *drifan*

'drive' were voiced [v] (as many have shown, such as Hogg 1992a, Lass 1994).[5]

This takes us beyond comparative reconstruction. However, while evidence in the form of written texts is available for this reconstruction, the issues for the historical linguist are essentially the same. This is why I do not adopt the asterisk to mark 'reconstructed' forms in PIE: all historical linguistics deals with reconstructed forms. Historical linguists aim to work out past I-languages, and it is clear that past I-languages, as objects of enquiry, cannot be observed. This is exactly the same for OE (Middle Dutch, nineteenth-century Korean, *etc.*) as it is for PIE: none of them can be observed. The ultimate object of study for historical phonologists who work with attested languages is not the written forms. Written forms can provide important evidence for historical phonology, but they need to be interpreted with skill and caution (see, for example, Lass to appear, Minkova to appear). Thus, the OE letter <f> is not a phonological (I-linguistic) object, but *fisc*, *wulf*, *wulfas*, *drifan*, as examples of preserved E-language from the past, can be used as evidence in the reconstruction of the I-language of the speakers who wrote the Old English texts that survive. In the same way, the comparison of attested forms such as *three* with an initial fricative (and Gothic nominative neuter *þrija*, the oldest Germanic form for 'three') with the overwhelming majority of other Indo-European languages which have a stop (such as Latin *tres* and Old Church Slavonic *trije*), as summarised in (8), can be used as evidence in the reconstruction of a /t/ in the I-language of the PIE speakers (who happened not to leave us any written records). The OE reconstruction of an underlying /f/, which was realised as [f] and [v], *is* a reconstruction – it is not anything that is found in texts. Past phonological systems need to be reconstructed by (historical) phonologists using evidence from written sources (and from elsewhere, such as the forms found in living descendent dialects, and direct evidence from commentaries on pronunciation, where it is available), and this means that *both* OE /f/ and PIE /t/ are reconstructed and thus have the same phonological status, meaning that neither (or both) need an asterisk.[6]

We have dealt with historical phonology in some detail here, but the same conceptual issues arise in the reconstruction of other linguistic levels. I give here much briefer examples of the reconstruction of past syntactic and semantic states. The same range of indirect and direct evidence is available to do such reconstruction (written records, the comparative method, linguistic commentaries from the past), but comparative reconstruction is less successful in syntax because the systems involved are less straightforwardly compared.

A syntactic example: OE is reconstructed as a verb-second (V2) language, similar to contemporary German and Dutch. This means that the finite verb is expected to be the second constituent in main clauses (some syntactic processes can 'hide' this order,

---

[5] In fact, the precise laryngeal characteristics of the segments involved are subject to debate, like those of IE, but for different reasons (see Honeybone 2005). The current article is not the place for that debate, however, and the basic point stands whatever position is taken in laryngeal phonology. Once again, the fact that there is such debate shows that it is important to get the reconstruction right.

[6] In fact, it can be argued that the reconstructed linguistic entities of past languages have the same status as analyses of contemporary I-languages, too. Neither a past linguistic state nor a present one can be directly observed by a linguist. Rather, we need to use whatever E-linguistic evidence is available to us to figure out what the linguistic system is that we are investigating, and the result of linguistic analysis – the model of linguistic knowledge that we develop – is always constructed by the linguist. There is more and better evidence available to those investigating a contemporary language, such as native speaker intuitions, recordings, controlled experiments and massive corpora, but this construction of analyses of contemporary languages is essentially the same kind of activity as the reconstruction of deal languages: both are building models of I-languages using the best available evidence.

but it is assumed to be fundamental). Unlike in contemporary English, where the subject typically comes directly before the verb, many different kinds of constituents could directly precede the verb in OE: subjects, objects, adverbials etc. The sentences in (9), from *Orosius*, and (10), from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (both taken from Kroch & Taylor 1997), show the effects of V2: as is shown in the aligned gloss below the original OE, (9) has the finite verb (marked as 'V2'), preceded by its direct object ('O') and followed by the subject ('S'), and (10) has an adverbial ('A') where (9) has an object. The reconstruction of the synchronic syntactic patterns which allowed this type of word order need to be figured out by historical syntacticians, and several subtle syntactic subgeneralisations about the precise patterning of V2 constructions in OE have been discovered in a long strand of research on the topic (for example, van Kemenade 1987, Pintzuk 1991, Kroch, Taylor & Ringe 2000).

(9) þæt hus   hæfdon Romane to   ðæm anum tacne   geworht
     that building had   Romans with the   one feature constructed
     O   **V2**   **S**   etc.

(10) þær   wearþ se cyning Bagsecg ofslægen
     there was   the king   Bagsecg slain
     A   **V2**   **S**   etc.

    A semantic example: as is well known, and as was discussed in section 2, the meaning of words in and from the past needs subtle reconstruction. As an example of this, (11a) shows one sentence from an English letter from around 1740, from a Dr Rutherforth of Cambridge, which requires careful reconstruction of the meanings of most of its content words in order to be properly understood. This is shown in the translation into contemporary English in (11b). Both text and translation are taken from Honeybone & Honeybone (2010, p.c.); the main cases of semantic reconstruction are identified through underlining, emboldening and italics.

(11a) I suppose that *natural philosophy* and polite literature are the branches of **science** that you chiefly improve

(11b) I assume that the fields of **knowledge** that you work in are chiefly *science* and philology

    The meanings of words exist in the minds of the speakers of the languages that they are part of, so the meanings that have been reconstructed in (11b) are things that existed in the minds of a speaker of mid-18th century English. This is thus, once again, a case of I-linguistic, cognitive reconstruction.
    In working to understand the linguistic systems and states discussed above, structural historical linguists are (whether they describe it as such or not), aiming to reconstruct past cognitive states. This has led to the writing of largely synchronic historical grammars, such as Campbell (1959), Hogg (1992b) and Braune, Ebbinghaus & Heidermanns (2004). It also expands the database of synchronic linguists, in the quest to understand what is possible or common in language. For example, Dresher & Lahiri (1991) show that the structure of the metrical foot in the phonology of Early Germanic languages was an uneven moraic trochee, a type of foot which had previous been claimed to be unattested (see Kager 1995).
    In order to make the case that historical linguistics engages in cognitive reconstruction, one final assumption (which has thus far been silently made) needs brief discussion. The ontological status of the entities that historical linguists reconstruct has, in fact, been a subject of some controversy in the literature. Fox

(1995: 9), discussing the status of the forms derived through comparative reconstruction, explains the issue thus:

> ... are we entitled to claim for such reconstructions the status of earlier linguistic forms? This controversy can be summed up in a confrontation between two views of reconstruction: the FORMULIST and the REALIST. The formulist view regards reconstructions merely as formulae which represent the various relationships within the data, while the less cautions realist view assumes that reconstructions can be taken to represent genuine historical forms of a real language, which happen not to have been recorded.

As discussed above, I take all reconstructions – both those done on the basis of the comparative method and those derived from written sources – to have the same status, so at least some of the points considered here are relevant to all aspects of reconstructive historical linguistics (although they have largely been previously considered in relation to the results of comparative reconstruction). Can we really assume that (for example) the phonological system reconstructed for PIE, or OE, or any other past language, should be seen as a 'real' I-language? The formulist position sees the reconstructions of historical linguists as useful fictions which are essentially place holders for the comparisons themselves – they should not be taken to be the real forms of any language. This position has influential advocates, for example Meillet (eg, 1903), but it must be wrong. It is only if we assume that reconstructed languages are real languages, and should thus be given the same status as the models of I-language that we construct for contemporary languages, that uniformitarianism can place a constraint on reconstruction (as we saw above that it must). Linguistic typology and linguistic theory can only be used in arguments about reconstruction (such as the Glottalic Theory, for example), if we assume that reconstructed languages are the same sort of thing as the languages that linguists work with to figure out typological and theoretical generalisations in the first place. If we don't, then we have no control on what we can reconstruct. (The need to reject postmodern doubt that we can ever understand the things going on in the minds of others for these claims to hold will be clear.)

The realist position is well supported in historical linguistics. The authors of the two most detailed recent considerations of historical linguistic method (Fox 1995 and Lass 1997) both tend towards realism in reconstruction. Thus Fox (1995: 13) writes that "...as realists rightly maintain, to be significant the results [of reconstruction] must be interpretable in historical terms", and Lass (1997: 274) that "protolanguages ... are simply languages like any others, if with poorer information sources ...". The formulist position seeks to place the things that are reconstructed outside of the minds of speakers, by claiming that they are not languages at all, but this claim is not consistent with the practice of historical linguists, nor is it compelling. The aspects of languages that are reconstructed in historical linguistics must be assumed to represent aspects of past I-languages. We should not claim that languages are always (or ever) fully reconstructable (especially not if we assume that variation is grammatically inherent in language, as it is often difficult to reconstruct much of the way in which a language must have varied) but we can reconstruct *parts* of the linguistic systems involved (such as the underlying phonological contrasts of IE, or finite verb placement in OE), and these parts existed in the minds of speakers. Historical linguistics does, then, in the ways described above, seek to engage in cognitive reconstruction.

3.2 Does historical linguistics *only* involve cognitive reconstruction?
Any acquaintance with work on structural historical linguistics will show that it does

not *just* involve the reconstruction of past linguistic systems. The synchronic aspect of historical linguistics can be underestimated, but it is subservient to diachronic study: much of historical linguistics aims to understand how and why one linguistic state can change into another. Thus, part of the interest in comparing Gothic *þrija* with Old Church Slavonic *trije* certainly is to reconstruct PIE forms, but part of it is to understand the phonological change that occurred in Germanic, by which stops became fricatives – part of the famous Grimm's Law. And part of the interest in working out that OE had a single series of underlying fricatives is to go on to find out how this changed, so that we now have two series. English has lost V2, at least in the basic type of clauses illustrated in (9) and (10), so that the subject must now always precede the verb, and this has been the major focus of work on V2 in the history of English. Also, of course, the changes that can be seen by comparing (11a) and (11b) have occurred and are of major interest to historical linguists. Synchronic systems are often only reconstructed so that they can be compared with other, temporarily distinct systems and changes can be observed.

One central aim of historical linguistics is to work out a theory of linguistic change, addressing such questions as: *how does change happen? can it happen within an individual? or does it typically happen cross-generationally, when a new generation misacquires the language of their parents?* Historical linguistics can try to work out if anything is possible in change, or whether we can formulate a notion of what would be an 'impossible change',[7] and if so, why they are impossible. These are diachronic questions and particular changes may not be anything to do with I-language – they could be due to population movements, or misperception, or structural ambiguity and the unconscious choice of speakers to adopt a different linguistic system. While I-linguistic factors may be involved (if change can occur within a grammar), they need not be. Historical linguistics does engage in cognitive reconstruction, but that is not all that it does.

4. What do historians do?

Do historians engage in cognitive reconstruction? As was the case in the last section, certain philosophical commitments need to be made in order for this claim to hold. The necessary conceptual position in history is probably proportionately less common than that sketched for historical linguistics above, but it is compelling, is well represented in the literature and is accepted (if maybe tacitly) in certain key intellectual traditions.

4.1 Does history involve cognitive reconstruction?
The commitment in terms of the philosophy of history that is needed to make my case is an interpretation of the (at least partly) *idealist* approach to history, which is associated mostly closely with the historian R. G. Collingwood. Idealism focuses on the mental world, leaning towards the notion that a range of things (which might not seem to do so on a 'common-sense' approach) actually only exist in the mind. At its most extreme, idealism can argue that no aspect of reality exists independent of our perceptions, but Collingwood was wary of being identified as a total idealist (D'Oro 2006), and we do not need to subscribe to full-blown philosophical idealism to accept

---

[7] Indeed, it seems that we can: a change such as p, t, k > f, θ, x can occur, and did as part of Grimm's Law, thus explaining the correspondence of non-Germanic /t/ with Germanic /θ/, but the reverse does not ever seem to be attested (see, for example, Kümmel 2007).

Collingwood's ideas (in the same what that it is not actually *necessary* to accept full-blown generativism in order to accept the mentalist understanding of language which fits with Chomsky's ideas). We can retain the term 'idealism' to describe the approach, despite these and Collingwood's own caveats, however, as is conventional in the philosophy of history. The idealist view of history can be understood as cognitivist in this way, in part echoing (3a): (i) history aims to understand past actions; (ii) these actions are due to human causality; (iii) human causality is due to the thoughts that the actors have; and (iv) thoughts exist in the cognitive realm.

Collingwood (1946) is his classic work on the philosophy of history (Collini & Williams 2004). It includes his famous definition of the idea of history: "history should be (a) a science, or an answering of questions; (b) concerned with human actions in the past; (c) pursued by interpretation of evidence; and (d) for the sake of human self-knowledge" (1946: 10-11). The relevant points here are (b), as mentioned above, and (d), which provides the perspective which leads to the ideas in focus here. Collingwood argued that we can understand ourselves through history because we can develop an understanding of psychology through history, and that this is because history *is*, practically, psychology. Collingwood wrote about a conception of psychology as a type of historical study, whose aim "would be to detect types or patterns of activity, repeated over and over again in history itself'" (1946: 224, see Connelly & Costall 2000), and this requires us to understand the thoughts of those who performed these activities in the past. (The need to reject postmodern doubt that we can understand the minds of others will again be clear for these claims to hold.)

The crucial part of Collingwood's argument for our purposes is his emphasis "upon history as the interpretation of purposive action and hence upon the primacy of the need to recover historical agents' own understanding of their situation" (Collini & Williams 2004). This is linked to his conception of psychology, but is not tied to it. Like many others, Collini & Williams (2004) cite Collingwood (1946: 215) as his most famous claim, given here in (12).

(12) "all history is the history of thought ... and therefore all history is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind"

Collini & Williams (2004) write further that "this was intended not as a prescription of the method of historical enquiry, but a description of its success: only insofar as historians can 're-enact' in their own thought what an act meant to its agent can they explain that act." This leads us to an understanding of the definition of the object of study in history as *actions*, as D'Oro (2006) explains:

> ... the subject matter of history, understood as a science of the mind, is actions – actions understood not simply as the doings of human beings but of human beings in so far as they are rational. Actions, in the sense in which they constitute the subject matter of historical investigation have an 'inside' that events lack. To explain an event all we need to do is to subsume it under a general law that is obtained by inductive generalisation, through the observation of repeated events of type B following events of type A. In order to understand an action, by contrast, we need to render it intelligible by reconstructing the thought processes that inform it.

On this approach, the key goal of history is cognitive re-enactment, as in (12) – the historian should aim to re-enact (that is, to reconstruct) the thought processes that led to the historical actions that history tries to understand. The uniformitarian principle of (7) is important here: we must assume that the mind has not changed in the way that it manipulates or creates thoughts throughout history, for if it had, past thoughts

could be unrethinkable.

If we take Collingwood at his word (1946: 301), re-enactment should be absolutely literal cognitive reconstruction: the very thought that an agent had in the past can be repeated.

> […] in its immediacy, as an actual experience of his own, Plato's argument must undoubtedly have grown up out of a discussion of some sort, though I do not know what it was, and been closely connected to such a discussion. Yet if I not only read his argument but understand it, follow it in my own mind re-enacting it with and for myself, the process of argument which I go through is not a process resembling Plato's, it is actually Plato's so far as I understand him correctly.

The claim is not that we need to engage in telepathy. Rather, "it is possible in principle to re-enact the thoughts of others because thoughts, unlike physiological processes, are not private items unique to the person who has them, but publicly rethinkable propositional contents" (D'Oro: 2006). D'Oro further explains that this approach has been seen as counterintuitive:

> since to say that the thought of the agent and that of the historian are the same appears to presuppose that there is only one rather than two numerically distinct acts of thought, that of the historian and that of the agent. Collingwood's point, however, is that, since thought proper is conceptually distinct from the physiological process in which it is instantiated, the criterion of numerical identity that is usually applied to physiological processes is not applicable to thought. Thoughts, in other words, are to be distinguished on the basis of purely qualitative criteria, and if there are two people entertaining the (qualitatively) same thought, there is (numerically) only one thought since there is only one propositional content.

If a historian is able to fully reconstruct the thoughts[8] that led someone from the past to carry out certain actions, they can be said to understand those actions, and will thus be able to write accurate historical works about those actions. In this sense, historians must engage in cognitive reconstruction. Although the act of writing about this is not reconstruction in itself, the same applies to the act of a historical linguist writing about the PIE consonantal system or OE syntax: the reconstruction must be done first, in order for the work which focuses on it to be written. Part of such work might indeed simply be a record of the reconstructions: a table of PIE consonants, or a description of the thinking of a historical agent, but much of it will be reflection on the result of the reconstruction, and an attempt to place it in its context.

The implications of all this are that, in order to understand the actions of those who agitated for national self-determination in Austria-Hungary, for example, or who persecuted non-Catholics in fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spain, or who agreed the Acts of Union between England and Scotland, we need to rethink the thoughts that led to the actions involved. Most of the evidence for this is found in texts which are contemporary with (or, maybe, later than) the actions involved, and considerable skill is required to interpret these documents (informed by historical linguistics where necessary, as discussed above, particularly around (11)).

The approach sketched out here requires the historian to understand the mindset of the people that they are interested in, to develop a sense of empathy with them (again, this rejects postmodern arguments, such as those of Jenkins 1991). An example of the impact of this approach is considered in M. Honeybone (2008:16), who is discussing

---

[8] We may not need to assume that the very same thought exists in the minds of the original actor and the historian, as Collingwood argued – if a thought is simply *repeated*, we may escape the danger of Collingwood's mind-body distinction.

the writing of the history of a well-known witchcraft trial from the 17th century in the Vale of Belvoir in the English Midlands:

> European scholars have appreciated that the concept of early-modern witchcraft arose as an imaginative response to the widespread myth of the witches' sabbath, defined as 'A midnight meeting of demons, sorcerers and witches, presided over by the Devil, supposed in mediæval times to have been held annually as an orgy or festival.' [SOED] After extensive historical investigation it is now accepted that no actual 'sabbath' ever took place. Equally, however, the notion of the sabbath existed absolutely in the minds of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century men and women. This is a perfect justification for Collingwood's concept of history as the process of rethinking the thoughts of past people: 'wrong ways of thinking are just as much historical facts as right ones, and, no less than they, determine the situation (always a thought situation) in which the man who shares them is placed'. [Collingwood, 1946: 317]

Reconstructing past thoughts is surely not easy, but it just as surely the ideal that we should strive for in attempts to understand the past (at least, if we follow Collingwood). As the above point shows, if we are open to all the beliefs of those whose past we consider – 'false' beliefs and the general intellectual context, as well as anything we can glean about an individual writing a document – we can hope to come close enough to rethink the thoughts of those whose actions we are interested in.

Other historical artefacts, such as buildings and clothing from the past, can also help in the interpretation of past people's thoughts, and this has led some to reject the idealist position. As Evans (1997: 92) writes, "[m]any sources are not written at all. Getting inside the head of someone who buried treasure in a grave in the fourth century, or made a newsreel in the twentieth, is far from easy." This is a reasonable point, of course, but it is reminiscent of the mistaken distinction in historical linguistics between reconstructed forms which are standardly given an asterisk and those that are not, as discussed above. Those forms without asterisks are still reconstructed, even though they derive from written sources. Carr (1961: 16) explains that, in the same way, written sources, while privileged among types of evidence, still require a considerable amount of interpretation. He criticises the nineteenth-century 'fetishism of facts and documents', explaining that:

> The documents were the Ark of the Covenant in the temple of facts. The reverent historian approached them with bowed head and spoke of them in awed tones. If you find it in the documents, it is so. But what, when we get down to it, do these documents – the decrees, the treaties, the rent-rolls, the blue books, the official correspondence, the private letters and diaries – tell us? No document can tell us more than what the author of the document thought – what he thought had happened, what he thought ought to happen or would happen, or perhaps only what he wanted others to think he thought, or even only what he himself thought he thought. None of this means anything until the historian has got to work on it and deciphered it.

Just as linguistic reconstruction can proceed on the basis of texts or comparison, historical reconstruction can proceed on the basis of texts or other historical material, but information found in documents still needs processing to form the basis of reconstruction. It all requires careful interpretation in order for us to be able to do the reconstruction. The comparative method and the use of non-written sources simply need more care and provide less good evidence.

Although wary of some of the implications of Collingwood's ideas, Carr (1961) is generally sympathetic to the idealist approach, because it shows that history is not just a matter of finding dusty facts in documents. Thus, also citing Collingwood 1946, with an echo of (12), Carr (1961: 22) writes:

"The past which a historian studies is not a dead past, but a past which in some sense is still living in the present." But a past act is dead, i.e. meaningless to the historian, unless he can understand the thought that lay behind it. Hence "all history is the history of thought," and "history is the re-enactment in the historian's mind of the thought whose history he is studying." The reconstitution of the past in the historian's mind is dependent on empirical evidence. But it is not in itself an empirical process, and cannot consist in a mere recital of facts. On the contrary, the process of reconstitution governs the selection and interpretation of the facts: this, indeed, is what makes them historical facts.

Given all of the above, it is not unreasonable to conclude that historians need to reconstruct past cognitive states and actions (although this may not be a historian's conscious aim) when they work to understand past actions. It may be that this must sometimes remain an unachievable ideal, in that we can only get *close* to the original thought, because evidence for it is lacking. The ideal remains, though, that the thoughts that provided the context for the actions that we know of need to be reconstructed, and in principle can be rethought in the mind of the historian (who can then aim to invoke them in the mind of the reader of their work). History does, then, in the ways described above, seek to engage in cognitive reconstruction.

4.2 Does history *only* involve cognitive reconstruction?

Just as there are with historical linguistics, there are some aspects of history which are not themselves attempts at cognitive reconstruction. We have already considered that the actual writing of history, just like the writing of historical linguistics, may rely on reconstruction, but also involves much more than this. It is also surely the case that much of the work done by the historian in order to get to the position of being able to re-enact past thoughts is not reconstruction itself: the work that a historian carries out with documents and artefacts, for example, and conducting the background work which is necessary to 'do the history'. This is rather different to the conclusion of section 3.2. It may be that history is essentially a synchronic discipline, to the extent that it does not seek to deal with diachronic change to the same extent that historical linguistics does. Rather than largely focusing on processes of change between one system and another, and the possible types of such changes that can occur, there is more emphasis in history than in historical linguistics on understanding particular times and places. While not all of the conduct of history is an engagement in cognitive reconstruction, more of it is than is the case in historical linguistics.

5. Two types of cognitive reconstruction

The case has been made above that the two disciplines under discussion here both engage in cognitive reconstruction. We have seen that it is not all that they do, and it should be remembered that I am focusing on *structural* historical linguistics in my discussion here, but I have argued that cognitive reconstruction is fundamental to the success of both. One final point needs to be considered: while the notion of cognitive reconstruction connects the two disciplines, it also distinguishes them, because the two types of cognitive reconstruction may be conceptually similar, but they are also fundamentally different.

There are clear conceptual connections between the two types of reconstruction. For example, both rely on uniformitarianism – that the human mind has been the same throughout history$_2$, since we evolved as a species, which means that the nature of language and of thought have always been the same. This, in turn, means that we stand a chance of being able to engage in cognitive reconstruction as part of our

disciplines. Furthermore, both disciplines have to work with sources which are imperfect reflections of their true object of study: often written sources, which need careful interpretation.

There is a substantial difference between the two types of reconstruction, however. This derives from a distinction between the objects of study in the two disciplines, set out here in (13).

(13a)   language is part of the unconscious mind
(13b)   agentive thoughts are part of the conscious mind

The distinction in (13) is an important one, and it explains many of the differences between the approaches discussed above. While the distinction between conscious and unconscious mental activity is a complex one – far too complex to be properly considered here – we can assume a basic distinction between those aspects of the cognitive world to which we can, in principle, have direct access, and those to which we cannot. We know an extraordinary number of subtle generalisations about the languages that we speak, but we also know that we do not have direct *conscious* access to this knowledge – we have intuitions about what is ungrammatical, but we cannot easily explain why. Linguistic rules are part of our unconscious knowledge. Contrary to this, we *can* reflect on the thoughts which lead us to perform specific actions, and such agentive thoughts are the subject matter of history, on the interpretation developed above.

One implication of (13) is that historical linguists do not try to re-enact a past linguistic state in their own minds, whereas, if we follow the idealist position, this is what historians should try to do. Of course, the reconstruction that historical linguists engage in is a product of their minds, but there is no expectation that the reconstruction should function in their minds as it did in the minds of the original speakers. In history, there is some sense in which a reconstruction *should* function in the same way in the historian as it did in the original thinker. In a sense, then, historical linguistics engages in a type of cognitive reconstruction which is less connected to the researcher than is the case in history: historians use the part of the mind that the object of the reconstruction resided in to do the reconstruction, whereas historical linguists reconstruct unconscious linguistic knowledge with conscious intent. These differences mean that quite distinct methodological tools and approaches are appropriate for the different types of reconstruction that the two disciplines engage in. Thus, while structural historical linguists and historians can surely learn from each other, we cannot expect to do things in the same way. We can likely better understand both disciplines if we see the differences as just as important as the similarities.

To conclude: on the basis of the philosophical positions defended here, historical linguistics and history do indeed both seek to engage in cognitive reconstruction, although the reconstruction involved is of different types. It may be that we do not always succeed in our attempts at such reconstruction, or that the reconstruction can only be partial, and it is clear that both disciplines do not *only* engage in such reconstruction, and sometimes only do it so that they can consider something else, but I hope to have shown here (and to have considered a range of non-obvious but connected issues along the way) that historical linguistics and history are both connected and distinguished by the notion of cognitive reconstruction.

References

Borsley, R. 2000. 'A postmodern critique of linguistics'. Ms, University of Essex. Available at http://privatewww.essex.ac.uk/~rborsley/Papers.htm

Braune, W. 1883. *Gothic Grammar with selections for reading and a glossary.* Translated from the second German Edition by G.H. Balg. New York: Westermann.

Braune, W., Ebbinghaus, E. & Heidermanns, F. 2004. *Gotische Grammatik*, 20th edition. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Burke, P. 2004. *Languages and Communities in Early modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Campbell, A. 1959. *Old English Grammar*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Carr, E.H. 1961. *What is History?* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Chomsky, N. 1965. *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Chomsky, N. 1986. *Knowledge of Language: its Nature, Origin, and Use*. New York: Praeger,

Collingwood, RG. 1946. *The Idea of History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Collini, S. & Williams, B. 2004. 'Collingwood, Robin George (1889–1943)' In: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. http://oxforddnb.com/

Connelly, J. & Costall, A. 2000. 'R.G. Collingwood and the Idea of a Historical Psychology.' In: *Theory & Psychology* 10, 147-170.

D'Oro, G. 2006. 'Robin George Collingwood.' In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.) http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/collingwood/.

de Saussure, Ferdinand. 1916. 'Cours de linguistique générale' In: Bally C. & A. Sechehaye, (eds.), with A. Riedlinger, Lausanne and Paris: Payot; trans. W. Baskin, *Course in General Linguistics*, Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977.

Derrida, J. 1967. *De la grammatologie*. Paris: Editions de Minuit

Dobson, E. 1968. *English Pronunciation 1500-1700*. Two volumes. Second edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Dresher, B.E. 1999. 'Ferdinand, we hardly knew you.' In: *Glot International* 4/6, 9. Available at http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~dresher/col15.html

Dresher, B.E. & Lahiri, A. 1991. 'The Germanic Foot: metrical coherence in Germanic.' In: *Linguistic Inquiry* 22, 251-286.

Evans, R.J. 1997. *In Defence of History*. London: Granta.

Evans, R.J.W. 1998. *The Language of History and the History of Language*. Inaugural lecture delivered before the University of Oxford. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Fox, A. 1995. *Linguistic Reconstruction: an Introduction to Theory and Method*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gamkrelidze, T. & Ivanov, V. 1973. 'Sprachtypologie und die Rekonstruktion der geminindogermanischen Verschlüsse.' In: *Phonetica* 27, 150-156.

Hart, J. 1569. *An Orthographie: Conteyning the Due Order and Reason, howe to Write or Paint Thimage of Mannes Voice, Most Like to the Life or Nature*. London: William Seres.

Hogg, R. 1992a. 'Phonology and Morphology.' In: R. Hogg (ed.). *The Cambridge History of the English Language, I: the beginnings to 1066*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 67-167.

Hogg, R. 1992b. *A Grammar of Old English. Vol 1: Phonology*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Honeybone, D. & Honeybone, M. 2010. *The Correspondence of the Spalding Gentlemen's Society 1710-1761*. Lincoln: Lincoln Record Society.

Honeybone, M. 2008. 'Practising history: writing a history book today'. In: *East Midland Historian* 16, 12-17.

Honeybone, P. 2005. 'Diachronic evidence in segmental phonology: the case of obstruent laryngeal specifications.' In: van Oostendorp, M. & van de Weijer, J. (eds.). *The Internal Organization of Phonological Segments*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 319-354.

Jenkins, K. 1991. *Re-thinking History*. London: Routledge.

Job, M. 1989. 'Sound change typology and the "Ejective Model".' In: Vennemann, T. (ed.) *The New Sound of Indo-European*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Jones, C. 1989. *A History of English Phonology*. London: Longman.

Kager, R. 1995. 'The metrical theory of word stress.' In: Goldsmith. J. (ed.). *The Handbook of Phonological Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 367-402.

Kemenade, A. van 1987. *Syntactic Case and Morphological Case in the History of English*. Dordrecht: Foris.

Kroch, A. & Taylor, A. 1997. 'Verb movement in Old and Middle English: dialect variation and language contact.' In: van Kemenade, A. & Vincent, N. (eds.). *Parameters of Morphosyntactic Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 297-325.

Kroch, A., Taylor, A. & Ringe, D. 2000. 'The Middle English verb-second constraint: a case study in language contact and language change' In: Herring, S., van Reenan, P. & Schosler, L. (eds.). *Textual Parameters in Older Languages*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 353-391.

Kümmel, M. 2007. *Konsonantenwandel: Bausteine zu einer Typologie des Lautwandels und ihre Konsequenzen*. Wiesbaden: Reichert.

Lass, R. 1994. *Old English: a Historical Linguistic Companion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lass, R. 1997. *Language Change and Historical Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lass, R. (to appear) 'Interpreting alphabetic orthographies and orthographic change.' In: Honeybone, P. & Salmons, J. *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Phonology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marwick, A. 2001a. 'The Fundamentals of History'. In: *History in Focus* 2. http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/index.html

Marwick, A. 2001b. *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Meillet, A. 1903. *Introduction à l'étude comparative des langues indo-européennes*. Paris: Hachette.

Minkova, D. (to appear) 'Establishing phonemic contrast in written sources: direct and indirect evidence.' In: Honeybone, P. & Salmons, J. *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Phonology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Munslow, A. 2001. Author's response to O'Brien (2001). *History in Focus* 2. http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/index.html

Newmeyer, F. 1986. *The Politics of Linguistics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

O'Brien, P. 2001. Book review: 'An Engagement with Postmodern Foes, Literary Theorists and Friends on the Borders with History.' *In: History in Focus* 2. http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/index.html

Pei, M. 1965. *Invitation to Linguistics: a Basic Introduction to the Science of Language*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Pintzuk, S. 1991. *Phrase structures in competition: variation and change in Old English word order*. PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania.

SOED: *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*. 1987. Third

edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Törnquist-Plewa, B. 2000. 'Contrasting ethnic nationalisms: eastern central Europe'. In: Barbour, S, & Carmichael, C. *Language and Nationalism in Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 183-220.

Trudgill, P. 2004. *New-Dialect Formation: The Inevitability of Colonial Englishes*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Warkentin, J. 2009 (1985). 'Historical Geography.' In: *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Foundation of Canada http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/

Whitney, W. 1867. *Language and the Study of Language: Twelve Lectures on the Principles of Linguistic Science*. London: Trübner.