Today’s topic:

• Internal reconstruction
Methods of reconstruction

• Comparative reconstruction
  - Uses cognate sets to compare related languages
  - Goal is to reconstruct a shared ancestor — a protolanguage

• Internal reconstruction
  - Uses evidence from within one language
  - Goal is to reconstruct an older form of the language — a prelanguage

• Why do internal reconstruction?
Methods of reconstruction

Why do internal reconstruction?

• When a language has no known relatives, there may be no other option

• When a language has undergone a great deal of change since it diverged, internal reconstruction may help us get it “closer” to its relatives before we attempt comparative reconstruction

• We can do internal reconstruction on a protolanguage!
Internal reconstruction

• Basic idea: Any inconsistencies or complexities we see in the behavior of a language are the result of historical change
  - Internal reconstruction attempts to ‘undo’ a change and hypothesize an earlier, more regular state of the language

• Comments/discussion?
Internal reconstruction

• In essence, the act of applying internal reconstruction to a language means we are making the following assumptions:
  - All phonemes used to have one allophone
  - All morphemes used to have a one-to-one sound/meaning relationship

• Are these claims guaranteed to be true?
  - Use internal reconstruction with care
  - It’s best justified if a reconstruction unifies multiple phenomena, or makes systematic relationships with other lgs more clear
Examples

• Try it: Huli, in Ex 3 for Ch 7 in IHL (p 133)
• Famous case: Indo-European ‘laryngeals’
  - See case study in IHL, Ch 7
• Another appealing case: Vowels of pre-Old Japanese
  - See data handout
• Doing internal reconstruction often looks a lot like doing a regular synchronic linguistic analysis…
  - What’s the difference, conceptually?
Limitations of internal reconstruction

• This method will generally not find **unconditioned** sound changes (why not?)

• It may not reveal the full complexity of changes that have occurred (why not?)

• If we apply internal reconstruction to ‘factor out’ an alternation that was actually present in the protolanguage, our results are misleading
  - What evidence would suggest that an alternation was present in the protolanguage?