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On the identity of linguistic units in diachronic studies (Exemplified by English)

Abstract

The article focuses on the problems of diachronic identification of linguistic units pertaining to different levels of language. The emphasis is on the necessity of this procedure in historic studies of language in regard to heterochronic linguistic forms. The examples of linguistic units on the phonetic and lexical levels are provided from English. With resort to the methods of comparative and historic linguistics, the study proceeds to establish inconsistency between the synchronic and diachronic identity of a phoneme as a component of different words. To this end, a phoneme is diachronically represented as a number of successive forms. An identical source of origin as well as equivalence of historic forms and invariability of their number are recognized to be mandatory conditions to establish diachronic identity of a phoneme. On the lexical level, attention is paid to the factors of dissimilarity between the word-forms of a single lexeme. Notice is taken of more complexity suggested by the diachronic analysis of lexical units as compared with lower language levels. The latter fact is caused by a great number of word-forms typical of the inflexional parent languages, such as Indo-European, Germanic, and English itself at the earlier stages of its history.

Keywords: diachronic identity, history of English, linguistic unit, phoneme, lexeme.

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