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DISTINGUISHED PROFESSORS' LECTURES



Brian D. Joseph is Distinguished University Professor of Linguistics, Emeritus, and Kenneth E. Naylor Professor of South Slavic Linguistics, Emeritus, at The Ohio State University (Columbus, Ohio). A 1978 Harvard Ph.D., he also holds three honorary doctorates (from La Trobe University, University of Patras, and University of Thessaloniki). Linguistic Society of America President in 2019, he is author or co-author of some 350 articles, 200 notes and reviews, and 7 books, including *The Balkan Languages* (2025, Cambridge University Press, with Victor Friedman). His research focuses on language change, especially involving Greek — Ancient through Modern — on its own but also in its Indo-European and Balkan contexts. He is founder of the Laboratory for the Study of the Greek Language at Ohio State, an institution dedicated to studying Greek in all its manifestations across time.

NEOGRAMMARIANS REVISITED: LESSONS TO BE LEARNED IN THE 21ST CENTURY FROM 19TH CENTURY IDEAS

Prof. Brian D. Joseph

The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

■ Tuesday June 16, 2026, 11:30-13:00

■ Aula, Collegium Heliodori Świącicki,
Grunwaldzka 6

In this wide-ranging presentation, I start with the Neogrammarians of the 19th century and outline their approach to language change, especially sound change. I argue that, despite challenges to their views over the years, they basically got it right, whether wittingly or unwittingly, in recognizing three and only three mechanisms of change. These mechanisms are phonetically driven sound change (regular almost by definition but also by virtue of being based in phonetic production), analogy (of all sorts), and borrowing (representing all manner of changes based in language contact). After illustrating these three mechanisms and demonstrating a central role for analogy in helping us to understand the Neogrammarian approach to sound change, I argue that they are consistent with the three key aspects/dimensions of language, namely the physical/

anatomical dimension, the cognitive dimension, and the social dimension, respectively.

Moreover, inasmuch as language exists for humans in diachrony, i.e. across time, but joined with the fact that as humans we live in a continuous synchrony, this view gives us a basis for a reassessment of any synchronically oriented linguistic theory that ignores the social dimension. This presentation also provides an opportunity to offer a critique both of lexical diffusion and of grammaticalization, arguing (à la Kiparsky 1995) that lexical diffusion is nothing more than regular sound change plus analogy, and that both run counter to Occam's Razor, since they add to the change mechanisms we need to recognize without any accompanying or resulting benefit.



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