

## **Attested but Seemingly Impossible Sound Changes: New Evidence from New Caledonia.**

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Much argumentation in the domain of the study of sound change, and good deal of the guidance provided by reconstruction methodology, depends crucially on distinguishing between possible and impossible sound changes (as well as being sensitive to the shades of possibility between the two). It has been often proposed that one way to get a handle on these matters would be to construct a comprehensive database of attested sound changes.

In this talk, I will argue that current descriptions of sound change suffer from shortcomings of such severity as to make the utility of such an enterprise virtually nil. Only when historical linguists take seriously the need to consider all cognitively-relevant aspects of generation of speech sounds (phonological representations, phonological rules, and phonetic implementation) in providing an account for a given diachronic development can one begin to ask questions about what can and cannot befall these systems in the course of their diachronic transmission. In particular, the historical shifts of emphasis from the orthographic (Neogrammarians), to the phonemic (Structuralists), to the computational (Generativists) have, by adopting in turn a myopic perspective on the problem, failed to recognize the true nature of the issues at hand.

The central role of phonetics in constraining possible misparses of the input stream (à la Ohala-esque approaches to sound change) provide the key to understanding many types of diachronic development. My talk will focus on some which it does not, in my view, provide a direct account for, including some instances of changes which probably shouldn't take place under such a scenario, but do.