It is a truism of Historical Linguistics that prediction is not possible. Traditionally, diachronic studies describe the nature and causation of change over time. The result is that, although motivation for change is understood in increasingly sophisticated ways, it is believed that the linguist can look forward only from an earlier time to the present and not into the future (or, rather, not very far into the future). The notion of prediction is therefore generally rejected apriori.

We propose an exploration of ways in which prediction has, nonetheless, already figured in theories of language change as part of the analytic methodology of historical linguistics. With examples chosen principally from Germanic and Romance, we will consider, among others, the roles of drift, the uniformitarian principle, fast speech phenomena, and emergence as they affect the ability of linguistics to make accurate (or even plausible) predictions about the direction and nature of change.

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