

# HISTORICAL ROMANCE LINGUISTICS AND THE COGNITIVE TURN

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## 1. Institutional retreat of Romance philology

Romance philology is a product of early German Romanticism. Starting in the nineteenth century, it established itself as a scholarly discipline in European universities. But from the second half of the twentieth century onward, its position as a part of institutionalized academic activity in most countries could, increasingly, no longer be taken for granted.

There are still several international journals carrying the programmatic label "Romance", and the *Société de Linguistique Romane* holds a congress every three years. Some prominent representatives of a true Romance philology no doubt continue to teach and conduct research in various countries, yet one has the impression that institutionalized Romance philology has, to a large degree, been pushed back to the universities of the German-speaking countries where it had originated.

Even here, however, the survival of Romance philology is no longer to be taken for granted. Toward the end of the twentieth century, some in the field, facing a changing student body which, for reasons related to their potential employment, is more interested in language specialization than in a broad academic overview, have begun to call explicitly into question the unity of the field. Furthermore, facing increasing strictures in university financing, Romance philology as a unified field has to justify itself with ever more strenuous arguments to technocratic politicians, university administrators, and even

colleagues from related, “monoglot” philologies. Everywhere the specialists in Romance languages are being advised to break up their field in order to survive the state’s rigid budget cuts in the humanities, at least in restricted areas of their discipline. The fact that institutional specialization into French studies, Spanish studies, Italian studies, etc., has long since been an accepted practice in other countries, serves as a convenient argument in an increasingly internationalized academia.

All this is certainly to be differentiated again according to further aspects: even in the German-speaking countries, scholars in literary studies for the most part do not consider themselves Romance philologists to the same extent as linguists (numerous exceptions prove the rule!). Furthermore, synchronic linguists have a lesser affinity toward unified Romance philology than diachronic linguists.

## 2. Diachronic Romance linguistics as the core of Romance philology

This last point is of decisive importance here, and I would therefore like to discuss it in greater depth: the core of the unity of Romance philology is without any doubt diachronic Romance linguistics. A comparatist working in French literature may ask why he or she should work with Spanish and Italian literature as points of comparison and not for example with English, German, or Russian literature.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, a specialist in synchronic Spanish sociolinguistics could pose the question of whether his or her methodological points of reference and standards of comparison must lie exclusively in the Romance language area. To take a last example, synchronic language comparison is not actually bound to any language family, as modern linguistic typology has made very clear with its cross-linguistic studies using representative language samples from throughout the world. It has always been the historical-diachronic relationship of the modern Romance languages to Latin which holds Romance philology together at its innermost core.

What has always made diachronic Romance linguistics attractive is the tension between evidence of the relative unity and uniformity of a language group, which it reveals *qua* **Romance** linguistics, and the

<sup>1</sup> See Gauger 1981: 8. There are still, nevertheless, numerous literary scholars who continue to regard the Romance language area, with its Greco-Roman roots, as a common cultural area and structure their research accordingly.

emergence of linguistic diversity which it has to elucidate, systematize, and explain *qua* **historical-diachronic** linguistics.<sup>2</sup> Traditional problems of Romance philology are animated by precisely this tension: Western versus Eastern part/periphery versus center of the Romance linguistic area, *Romania continua* versus *Romania discontinua*, Romance vowel systems, and so on.

Of course, this Janus-faced discipline has always had a certain tendency as well toward justification, to the extent that its representatives feel themselves obligated to identify and stress the typically “Romance” features. This is illustrated by Eugenio Coseriu’s 1971 “integral typology” of the Romance languages: does it imply the ingenious phenomenological intuition of a “Romance” evolutionary principle or a set of hypostatizations which run counter to the effort to find typological parameters which are independent of individual languages?<sup>3</sup>

Despite such conflicts, it appears to be no accident that Romance linguistics has been called *praeceptorix linguisticae* (Gauger 1981: 9, 90 f.). What then makes Romance linguistics potentially so stimulating for other linguists as well? Is this still the case today?

## 3. Cognitive linguistics

I would like to try to show that recent theoretical developments in linguistics that can in a very broad sense be labeled “cognitive” once more show the merits of diachronic Romance linguistics to advantage.

Despite differences in detail, cognitive approaches can be characterized through the essential role they accord to our perceptual and conceptual processing of extra-linguistic reality and to the pragmatics of our interactions for shaping linguistic materials.<sup>4</sup> In the area of diachrony, this has given rise to new directions for research into

<sup>2</sup> For the logically necessary connection between the historicity of the object that we call ‘language’ and the fact of linguistic diversity, see Oesterreicher 2001: 1556, 1560, 1570 ff., who also makes clear that the concept ‘historical’ is much wider in range than the concept ‘diachronic’, for there are also synchronic questions which take the historicity of language into account. I have kept the adjective “historical” in the title of my article, in accordance with the subject matter of this Critical Cluster of studies, even though this article concerns “diachronic Romance linguistics” not only in terminology but also in content.

<sup>3</sup> For a critique of Coseriu’s position, see Lehmann 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. for example Rosch 1973; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Langacker 1987-1991; Taylor 1995; Kleiber 1990; Ungerer and Schmid 1996; Koch 1999a; Talmy 2000.

grammaticalization and exploration of semantic-grammatical change in general, as well as for the theory of lexical change.<sup>5</sup>

It is evident that such approaches, whether in synchrony or diachrony, revive fundamental problems in regard to the relationship between language and thought.<sup>6</sup> From the cognitive perspective, this relationship is by no means to be understood as a banal “translat[ing] mentalese into strings of words and vice versa”, as Pinker puts it (1994: 82). It is accepted that languages can be completely different even in their structures, but it is nevertheless presumed that the differences in important aspects do not occur randomly but arise instead from certain cognitive options. It is precisely this point that requires empirical examination, and for this purpose we need illustrative material. I will now show how the Romance language area is an ideal field for such a study.

#### 4. Between the historical and the universal

Eugenio Coseriu, in the Humboldtian tradition, differentiates between three levels of investigation into human language: “El lenguaje es una actividad humana *universal* que se realiza *individualmente*, pero siempre según técnicas *históricamente* determinadas [...] En el lenguaje se pueden, por tanto, distinguir tres niveles: uno *universal*, otro *histórico* y otro *individual* [...]” (Coseriu 1981: 269-70). Brigitte Schlieben-Lange (1999: 850-852) has shown that polyglot Romance philology has, much to its advantage, found itself caught in the tension between the historical and the universal level since its origins in the early nineteenth century. This “entre deux” (852) has always fostered an awareness of difference and a willingness to compare, while at the same time promoting the exploration of commonalities and a (cautious) movement toward the universal.

This attitude, familiar to Romance philologists, is precisely what a cognitively operated diachronic linguistics requires in dealing with the problems mentioned in section 3 above. It prevents a certain narrow-mindedness which can sometimes develop in a purely monoglot diachronic linguistics, which may not even reach a level of analysis

<sup>5</sup> Cf. for examples see Traugott 1985; Traugott and Dasher 2002; Sweetser 1990; Heine, *et al.* 1991; Traugott and Heine 1991; Hopper and Traugott 1993; Koch 1994; 1995; 1999; 2001a; Blank 1997, 131-344; 2001, 69-101; Blank and Koch 1999; Geeraerts 1997; Lang and Neumann-Holzschuh 1999; Detges 2001; Detges and Waltereit 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Gumperz and Levinson 1996; Lucy 1997; Trabandt 1998: 172-191; Niemeier and Dirven 2000; Pütz and Verspoor 2000.

that deserves the “cognitive” label. Most of all, it avoids prematurely treating the findings at the historical level as universal, especially making the characteristics of certain individual languages into the standard of an analysis of linguistic universals.

There have been, for instance, repeated attempts in the past several decades to reduce certain cross-linguistic observations regarding the making of existential, locative, and possessive constructions to a unitary synchronic underlying structure which would be valid for all languages, to be defined in ‘localist’ terms (among others, see Lyons 1967; Clark 1978; Kawaguchi 1991; Freeze 2001). A Romance linguist who is working diachronically must find such a solution suspect, if for no other reason than the awareness that, within the Romance language area, different and in part differently directed cognitive “paths” lead to the development of the corresponding expressions: while French *il (y) a*, Spanish *ha(y)*, Portuguese *há* and Catalan (*hi*) *ha* have moved from the domain of *POSSESSION* (< Classical Latin *HABET*) into that of *EXISTENCE* and then of *LOCATION* (with rhematization of the located object), in the case of Italian *c'è*, an expression for *EXISTENCE* has originated just from the domain of *LOCATION* (Koch 1999b; for criticism of localist approaches in general see also Heine 1997: 214-22). Linguistic entities that emerged in such diachronically different ways cannot be reduced to a single universal constant without disregarding the historical distinctiveness of the individual languages.

Although displaying at first sight primarily interlinguistic differences, this material quickly reveals its ‘cognitive’ appeal, since the solutions which are recognizable in certain Romance languages or language groups are not simply the accidental result of language change. Rather, they correspond to cognitively natural metonymic or metaphorical bridges. Here one’s attention is inevitably directed away from the Romance language area towards the outside, at other languages. The path observed in Italian *c'è* reappears at least in English *there is*. Similarly, the development of French *il (y) a* etc. corresponds to a path observable in a number of other languages, such as in Modern Greek *éçi*, Southern German *es hat*, Brazilian Portuguese *tem*, Haitian Creole *gen*, Bulgarian *ima*, Swahili *-na*, Nubi *fíi*, etc. (Heine 1997; Heine and Kuteva 2002: 241-42.; Koch 1999b: 288-95). Like a “microcosm”, the Romance language area shows us, through its facts of linguistic change, fundamental cognitive options in exemplary fashion.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> One should note, by the way, that the Romance language area is represented twice more here in the form of Brazilian Portuguese and Haitian Creoles, to be discussed below.

## 5. Romance linguistics and cognitive onomasiology

At this point, one notes an interesting change in perspective relative to the tendencies observed in section 2: the question is no longer one of extracting that which is uniformly "Romance" but rather of noting the diversity of developments within the Romance language area. While the search for Romance uniformity, which retains its legitimacy, is semasiologically inspired (etymologically identical *signifiants* are interpreted according to equivalent functionality or typology), the search for diversity within the Romance language area has a clear onomasiological starting point: one applies a grid of conceptual and/or typological parameters to the Romance material and observes how the individual languages behave in this respect. The onomasiological approach is, for Romance philology, nothing new. On the contrary, traditional Romance philology made decisive contributions to the development of onomasiological methods such as *Sachen und Wörter* (Quadri 1952). Most of the well-known synthetic language maps of Romance philology are, by definition, onomasiological (Rohlf's 1971).

In this respect, an important insight has long been known to Romance philology: the genetic relationship between certain languages by no means guarantees uniform "solutions" in the area of semantics. This is even more true from a cognitive perspective, because what is interesting from this perspective is no longer the materiality of the *signifiant* but rather the perceptual or conceptual relations and differences. From the standpoint of a cognitive onomasiology, then, one may ask how the conceptual field FLESH/MEAT developed its modern designations in the Romance language area. All of the major Romance languages have materially retained Classical Latin *CARO*, *-NIS*, but only Spanish/Portuguese/Italian/Romanian *carne* and Catalan *carn* continue the conceptual range of the classical Latin expression (only a single word for FLESH + MEAT), while in two languages there exists a taxonomic differentiation between FLESH (Modern French *chair*, Sardinian *carre*) and MEAT (French *viande*, Sardinian *petta*, *pezza*). In both languages, the designation for the narrower concept FLESH emerged through semantic narrowing of Latin *CARO*. The designation for the narrower concept MEAT, by contrast, emerged very differently in Modern French and in Sardinian: on the one hand through semantic narrowing with respect to the concept of FOOD (< Old French *viande* < Vulgar Latin *\*VIVANDA*, the original meaning of which remains recognizable in Italian *vivanda* 'food', borrowed from Old French), and on the other hand through metonymy with respect to the concept of PIECE (< Vulgar Latin

*\*PETTIA* [via ellipsis of *CARNIS*?], which we also find, with this or with a close meaning, in French *pièce*, Spanish *pieza*, and Italian *pezza*[-o]). The *signifiant* material involved is found in large parts of the Romance language area, but the diachrony shows rather different cognitive options.

## 6. Cognitive onomasiology and abduction

Obviously, the abundance of Romance language material poses a real challenge to Romance philologists in their position of *entre deux* in making observations on different options in language change and in developing cognitive hypotheses. What is epistemologically important in this context is the procedure of abduction, through which scholars can make interesting hypotheses (Peirce 1955; Reilly 1970: 23-77). This procedure begins with the observation of a "surprising fact", leads then to the development of a hypothesis, under which this fact would be a matter of course, and finally concludes that there is reason to suspect that the hypothesis is true.

In the case of the phenomena already mentioned in section 4, it is striking that within the Romance language area the metaphorical path *EXISTENCE*  $\rightarrow$  *POSSESSION* has been taken not only by French (*avoir*, Spanish *haber* etc. < Latin *HABERE*, but for example also by Haitian Creole *gen* or by Portuguese *ter* (in certain varieties, especially Brazilian). Since not all Romance languages follow this pattern and etymologically different material is involved, the obvious hypothesis is that, in this case, polygenetically, the same cognitive path came into play, so that each one of the individual cases no longer appears to be accidental but can be seen instead in the light of this hypothesis (Koch, in press a). Naturally, the hypothesis can be tested empirically only if one leaves the Romance language area and examines other languages, as indicated in section 4. But the Romance material alone (to which some Creole languages belong as well) provides an essential stimulus for the abduction process. A perfectly emblematic example here is French *tête*, Italian *testa* etc., which can be traced back to Latin *TESTA* through a metonymic-metaphoric two step change of *HEAD*  $\rightarrow$  *SKULL*  $\rightarrow$  *BOWL* (Koch 1997: 231-32, 236; Blank 1998: 20-22, 24). Alert non-Romance etymologists, too, like to cite this case, for example in order to make cognitively plausible German *Kopf* 'head' < Latin *CUPPA* 'bowl', or German *Haupt* 'head' (with respect to Old Indo-European *kapṛta* 'bowl; skull'), each of which is derived from completely different mate-

rial (Kluge and Seebold 1995: s.v.v. *Kopf, Haupt*; and vice versa Rey 2000: s.v. *tête*).

Even where the Romance language area shows rather more internal diversity, the cognitive relevance of certain examples from the Romance “microcosm” has developed a remarkable influence on general linguistics. One need only think of the future tense forms emerging through grammaticalization, where the Romance language area offers a wide range of cognitive types which appear polygenetically in many other languages. This explains why the Romance examples are frequently cited in the relevant literature: the modal type OBLIGATION: Spanish *cantaré*, Italian *canterò*, etc. ‘I will sing’ < Latin CANTARE HABEO; the modal type DESIRE: Rumanian *voi cânta* ‘I will sing’ < Vulgar Latin \*VOLEO CANTARE; the GO type: French *je vais chanter*, Spanish *voy a cantar*, ‘I will sing’ etc. and the PROGRESSIVE type: Haitian Creole *m ap chante* ‘I will sing’.<sup>8</sup>

It is no accident, then, that the “old masters” of Romance philology often had already proto-cognitive intuitions. One thinks of Leo Spitzer’s observations in a long footnote (1967: 176-178 n1) on future tense forms in Romance and non-Romance languages. Olaf Deutschmann’s (1953) studies of quantity designations in the Romance language area, for example, are a real treasure trove for today’s cognitivists (Koch 1997: 232-234; 2001b: 28). Adolf Zauner (1903) already had some sense of the cognitive wealth of body-part terms in the Romance language area; this conceptual domain has been taken up with cognitively updated methodical-theoretical tools in two current projects at the University of Tübingen – the Romance project *Dictionnaire étymologique et cognitif des langues romanes* (DECOLAR) and the general comparative linguistic project “Lexical Change – Polygenesis – Cognitive Constants: The Human Body”.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, not all conceivable cognitive paths which lead to a certain conceptual target are represented within the Romance language area. Thus, the path, found throughout the world, of POSSESSION LOCATION, such as in Russian *u m’ en’a byla kniga* ‘I had a book’ (Heine 1997; Heine and Kuteva 2002: 205; Koch 1999b: 283-84), is at best

<sup>8</sup> Cf. for example Fleischman 1982; Hopper and Traugott 1993: 9-10; Bybee et al. 1994: 243-280; Detges 2001: 147-87.

<sup>9</sup> For DECOLAR see: Blank, Koch and Gévaudan 2000; Gévaudan, Koch and Neu 2003; for polygenesis project: Koch and Steinkrüger 2001; Koch, in press a; for the theoretical basis of both projects: Koch 1995; 1997; 2000; 2001b and c; Blank 1997; 2000; in press; Gévaudan 2003.

marginal in the Romance language area (for example French *ce livre est à moi* ‘this book is mine’). Yet this is not the important point. What is decisive is the *forma mentis*, which opens Romance philology as a matter of course to such problems (see also Dworkin, in press). That the same is true of, for example, the “sister field” of polyglot Slavic philology, does not need to be dwelt on here. It is surely no accident that initiatives such as the *Wörterbuch der vergleichenden Bezeichnungen* (Schöpfer 1979-) or, recently, Sakhno 2001 have similar origins.

## 7. The excellence of Romance data

For this kind of research one needs a wealth of empirically derived data, and the Romance language area offers precisely this in unique quantity and quality.

The competence of a well-trained Romance linguist assures an overall view of at least two to three Romance languages and their earlier stages and varieties, of the overall Romance context, and of the linkages to other Romance languages. This guarantees the accuracy of the data, which is unfortunately not always assured in broad cross-linguistic typology.

The frequently –and justifiably so– emphasized merit of Romance languages, “che rappresentano l’unico esempio di un gruppo di lingue genealogicamente affini la cui base, il Latino, ci è conservato”, is invaluable (Tagliavini 1972: 4; also Gauger 1981: 9). At most, only the relationship of the modern Indo-European Indian languages to recorded Sanskrit stands comparison (although it is in some respects more complicated). To a large extent, Romance diachronic linguists do not need to concern themselves with starred forms, which pose considerable methodological problems, particularly in the area of semantics (such as reconstructed meanings!).<sup>10</sup>

In conclusion, the Romance language area offers material in a quantity, stimulating diversity, and quality of documentation as does no other language family. The contribution of Romance philology is therefore not to be dismissed from cross-linguistic cognitive diachrony.

<sup>10</sup> See Koch and Steinkrüger 2001; Koch in press a and b.

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