

Introduction

Steven N. Dworkin

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.210.02dwo>

Pages ix–xiv of

New Approaches to Old Problems: Issues in Romance historical linguistics

Edited by Steven N. Dworkin and Dieter Wanner

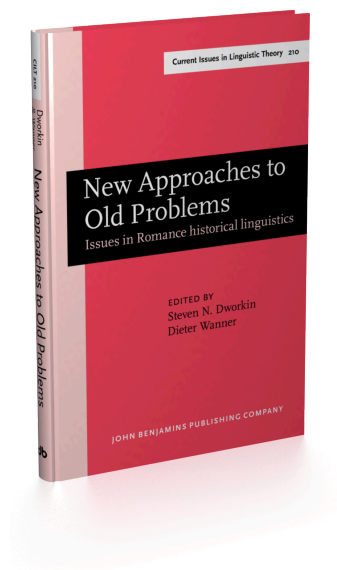
[*Current Issues in Linguistic Theory*, 210]

2000. xiv, 235 pp.

© John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

For further information, please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website at benjamins.com/rights



INTRODUCTION

STEVEN N. DWORKIN

University of Michigan

This volume gathers together revised versions of thirteen of the twenty-four papers read at the parasession, “New Solutions to Old Problems: Issues in Romance Historical Linguistics”, which took place as part of the 29th Linguistic Symposium on the Romance Languages held at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor, April 8–11, 1999. The reader will note immediately that the title of this book differs in one significant way from the parasession itself through the replacement of the word ‘solutions’ with ‘approaches’. What unites thematically these papers is the application to specific problems in Romance historical linguistics of new analytical approaches, many of which represent extensions into the diachronic realm of methodologies and theories originally formulated to elucidate aspects of synchronic phonology and syntax. The phenomena studied are familiar to all practitioners of Romance historical linguistics and represent long-standing problems in traditional historical grammar: diphthongization in Hispano-Romance of Spoken Latin open mid-vowels, syncope of intertonic vowels in Hispano- and Gallo-Romane, lenition of stops, the role of analogy in morphological change, word order, infinitival constructions, and the collocation of clitic object pronouns in Old French and Old Spanish.

These necessarily brief introductory remarks are not the appropriate place for an in-depth discussion of the extent to which current theories such as the Minimalist Program or Optimality Theory (OT) actually provide new insights into specific questions in the historical evolution of individual Romance languages. In *The Minimalist Program* Chomsky does not specifically raise the question of the applicability of the proposed approach to issues of language change. Working within the Minimalist framework, Mark Hale declares that the proper object of linguistic study is what Chomsky calls I-language, i.e., the grammar. The role played in linguistic analysis by such traditional concepts of language as ‘Spanish language’, ‘Romance languages’ has been seriously called into question. He goes on to state that if linguists adopt I-language as the

proper object of study for diachronic linguistics, ‘such traditional questions as “How was V2 lost in English?” cease to be sensible’ (1998:1). Such a view represents a radical departure from the traditional concept of historical linguistics.

Over the last five years several linguists have attempted to apply the principles of Optimality Theory (OT) to specific changes in the history of the Romance languages. Much work along these lines has taken the form of doctoral dissertations (e.g., Gess 1996, Holt 1997). According to OT, diachronic change results from the re-rankings of key constraints at different moments in a language’s history. Other than the use of constraints rather than phonological or syntactic rules, is there any difference from the generative view that language change results from rule addition, rule deletion, rule simplification, or rule re-ordering? Does such an approach really explain anything, or is it merely a descriptive restatement in formalized terms of well-known facts? The critique leveled by Wanner in this volume at grammaticalization and parameters can also apply to OT which fails to capture the dynamic nature of language change or to take into account its social conditioning. OT has not yet come to grips with the issues of how and why constraints are re-ranked.

Two of the essays focus on broad methodological issues illustrated with specific cases of language change. In his complex and weighty paper, “Beyond Parameters”, given as the opening plenary paper of the Symposium, Dieter Wanner argues that an immanent dynamic perspective on language acquisition and by extension language change will yield far greater insights than those provided by the inherently static nature of typologies, grammaticalization approaches, and especially parameters, all of which ignore the crucial role of social co-conditioning of language change. Wanner offers a discussion of the null-subject syndrome in the Romance Languages as a concrete example of the theoretical and methodological issues raised in his paper. Jurgen Klausenburger outlines in his essay, “A New View of Grammaticalization to Replace the ‘Cycle’ in Historical Romance Linguistics”, an alternative approach to grammaticalization to replace the traditional view of grammaticalization as a dichotomy/cycle between analytic and synthetic constructions. Elaborating on an earlier paper (Klausenburger 1998), he incorporates notions of syntactic branching as well as issues of processing and perception, and illustrates his proposal with the development of the postposed Rumanian definite article, French subject pronouns, and the Romance compound tenses.

The remaining papers employ several different approaches in their analysis of specific problems of phonology, morphology, and syntax. Three contributions to this volume seek to analyze specific issues of phonology, morphology,

and syntax respectively within the framework of OT. Dale Hartkemeyer, “An OT Approach to Atonic Vowel Loss Patterns in Old French and Old Spanish” reinterprets in terms of dynamic constraint interactions the much-studied and discussed unstressed vowel syncope of Old French and Old Spanish. He proposes a maximally-general anti-vowel constraint, *V, which eliminated pretonic and posttonic non-low vowels in non-word initial position whenever this constraint is crucially ranked ahead of MAX-IO-V. Aware that syncope did not affect all pertinent lexical items simultaneously, he claims that constraint re-ranking is diffused through the lexicon. Glenn A. Martínez, “Analogy and Optimality Theory in a Morphological Change of Southwest Spanish” argues that an OT formulation of the workings of analogy offers a sufficiently constrained mechanism to account for the second person singular preterit form *comites* (standard *comiste*) found in New Mexican Spanish. He concludes that within the OT framework analogy can be viewed as ‘the interaction of constraint rankings that maximize identity between words and lexicon optimization’ (p.95). Paul Hirschbühler and Marie Labelle, “Evolving Tobler-Mussafia Effects in the Placement of French Clitics” claim in their paper that a constraint-type approach that could be expressed in the framework of OT provides a more insightful account of the evolution of clitic placement with respect to the verb in the history of French than do previous analyses of these clitics as phrasal or head affixes. Changes in clitic placement result from changes in the ordering and strength of syntactic constraints rather than from the parametric changes proposed in other analyses. The authors also suggest as a possible alternative a Minimalist approach with late linearization of the clitic with respect to the verb.

France Martineau and Virginia Motapanyane examine Old and Middle French infinitive subordinators from the perspective of Principles and Parameters. They posit the existence of two homophonous subordinators *à*, which explains the diachronic variation in subordinator selection in the passage from Middle to Modern French. Typologically different (though homophonous) subordinators are used with CP and VP infinitives. The Minimalist Program is represented by Enrique Mallén’s essay “A Minimalist Perspective on Wackernagel’s Law”, in which the author analyzes from that perspective both Wackernagel’s Law and the Tobler-Mussafia Law, a subject which has generated a great deal of literature with regard to Medieval Spanish over the last ten years. He seeks to demonstrate that conditions governing the collocation of clitic pronouns in Old Spanish follow from general principles of Universal Grammar. Specifically the placement of clitic pronouns is analyzed as base generation of the lexical verb in complementizer position.

The role in language change of the various phenomena subsumed under the label grammaticalization has received considerable attention in contemporary diachronic linguistics. In addition to the relevant observations in the papers by Wanner and Klausenburger, two other contributions to this volume deal directly with specific cases of grammaticalization. Mark Davies, “Syntactic Diffusion in Spanish and Portuguese Infinitival Complements”, builds on his own previous studies of clitic climbing, causative constructions, subject raising in the histories of Spanish and Portuguese to offer insights into the mechanisms of syntactic change. Familiarity with the larger data bases offered in the author’s earlier work is essential to assess the conclusions offered here. Davies seeks to evaluate the merits of the Principles and Parameters approach and grammaticalization as means of explaining the spread of a syntactic change through the grammar. He favors grammaticalization as it places more emphasis on the mechanisms and processes by which syntactic constructions evolve gradually over time and spread through the grammar. The parameters based model implies an abrupt shift from Grammar 1 to Grammar 2 at the individual level and describes the differences in parameter settings between two stages of a language, but does not explain how or why the change in parameter settings occurred. However Lightfoot (1991) does allow for the possibility that new parameter settings may gradually permeate a speech community. Ken Johnson, “Grammaticalization Chains and French Complex-Inversion” applies Heine’s model of grammaticalization chains to the development in Middle and Early Modern French of postverbal subject pronouns in complex inversion constructions (e.g., *Philippe va-t-il au restaurant avec nous?* “Is Phillip going to the restaurant with us?”). Postverbal subject pronouns followed a grammaticalization path different from that of preverbal subject pronouns.

Not all the papers in this volume fit neatly into the framework of a specific formal theory. Andrés Enrique-Arias, “Spanish Object Agreement Markers and the Typology of Object Agreement Morphology” specifically states that he seeks to identify the causal mechanisms in the early modern language responsible for the obligatory preverbal placement of Spanish clitic object pronouns through a synthesis of knowledge from various linguistic traditions. The positioning patterns at issue are crucially connected to morphologization and its consequences for language processing. Object pronouns had become affixal object markers and were prefixed to the verb since tense, aspect, mood, and subject agreement markers already functioned as verbal suffixes. Donald Tuten’s essay, “Linking Social Change and Linguistic Change: Koineization in Early Castile”, exemplifies the sociohistorical approach to specific questions of language change. Many of the key phonological and morphosyntactic changes

which characterize the evolution of Castilian overlap with the lengthy reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula and the resultant population shifts and concomitant dialect mixing. The author seeks to explain the consolidation of the diphthongs /je/ and /we/ and the early loss in Castilian of preposition+ article contractions (*pelo*, *eno* < *por+lo*, *en+lo*) within the framework of the koineization model elaborated by Peter Trudgill (1986); cf. recent work along this line for Castilian by Ralph Penny and for New World Spanish by María Beatriz Fontanella de Weinberg. Thomas Cravens' paper, "Romance Lenition" illustrates the value of bringing to bear on a much studied issue of phonology material taken from less commonly examined varieties of Romance. He shows how data taken from Corsican and Sardinian can throw new light on the chronology and the nature of the processes involved in the several changes which comprise Romance consonantal lenition. Cravens identifies the loss of the assimilatory strengthening known as *rafforzamento sintattico* as the catalyst of the restructuring at issue. Monique Dufresne, Fernande Dupuis, and Mireille Tremblay, "The Role of Features in Historical Change" analyze the loss of aspectual prepositional prefixes as a productive derivational process (e.g. OFr. *amer* "to love", *aamer* "to fall in love") in Early Modern French. Prepositional prefixation in Old French changed the aspectual class of the verb. The authors adapt a feature approach to linguistic variation (and change) advocated by the Minimalist framework, according to which formal features may or may not be strong, and only strong features trigger overt movement. They conclude that the loss of productivity of Old French aspectual prefixes does not reflect a systemic change, as the feature system was unaffected. In their view, the loss of aspectual prefixes resulted from the semantic erosion undergone by prepositions.

In addition to the intrinsic merits of the individual contributions, the proceedings of a scholarly conference often reflect current trends in the discipline and show how it has changed over the years. All the papers in this volume examine within different theoretical and methodological frameworks issues of syntax and phonology to the total exclusion of lexical studies or derivational morphology. These thirteen papers taken as a whole reflect current tendencies in Romance historical linguistics (as practiced in the United States) and show that this field has changed in the last decades of the twentieth century. Kahane & Kahane (1983) and Posner (1998), veteran European-trained practitioners of this venerable discipline, independently observed that with regard to Romance linguistics in the final decades of the twentieth century, the emphasis has clearly shifted from Romance to Linguistics. In this volume, only Cravens' paper on Romance lenition examines diachronically a linguistic issue from a comparative Romance perspective. No contribution deals with those linguistic features that

characterize the Romance languages as a family. What many traditional Romanists consider to be the key question in Romance linguistics – how the Romance languages became different from Latin and from each other – is ignored. Almost completely absent here is the longstanding concern of Romance historical linguistics with the ‘relationship of language to history, society, and culture’ (Posner 1998:326). The emphasis in most of these papers is on theory and how the proposed analyses modify or advance a particular theoretical approach. Except for Tuten’s paper, written from a sociohistorical perspective, the relevant social, historical and cultural background of the changes at issue is not considered (though Wanner stresses in his essay their importance in his call for a dynamic approach to language change). The European style philologically-oriented historical Romance linguistics brought into the United States by such scholars as Henry R. and Renée Kahane, Yakov Malkiel, and Ernst Pulgram is no longer fashionable. Romance historical linguistics has joined the mainstream of current linguistic thinking, but in so doing, has lost some of its distinctive intellectual features. As practiced by most American Romanists, Romance historical linguistics is no longer the ‘humanistic linguistics’ described so eloquently by Kahane & Kahane (1980).

REFERENCES

- Gess, Randall. 1996. *Optimality Theory in the Historical Phonology of French*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, Wash.
- Hale, Mark. 1998. “Diachronic Syntax”. *Syntax* 1.1-18.
- Holt, Eric D. 1997. *The Role of the Listener in the Historical Phonology of Spanish and Portuguese: An optimality-theoretic approach*. Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.
- Kahane, Henry R. & Renée Kahane. 1980. “Humanistic Linguistics”. *Contemporary Studies in Romance Languages: Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Symposium on Romance Languages* ed. by Frank H. Nuessel, Jr., 159-182. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Linguistics Club.
- Kahane, Henry R. & Renée Kahane. 1983. “Three Samples of Research, Cis- and Transatlantic”. *Romance Philology* 36.418-428.
- Klausenburger, Jurgen. 1998. “Can Grammaticalization be Explained Invisible Handedly?”. *Historical Linguistics 1997* ed. by Monika S. Schmid, Jennifer Austin & Dieter Stein, 191-200. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Lightfoot, David. 1991. *How to Set Parameters: Arguments from language change*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Posner, Rebecca. 1998. “Romance Linguistics in the Nineties”. *Romance Philology* 51:3.326-355.
- Trudgill, Peter 1986. *Dialects in Contact*. Oxford: Blackwell.