

FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON “HISTORICAL ROMANCE LINGUISTICS: THE DEATH OF A DISCIPLINE?”

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It is a pleasure to offer to the readers of *La corónica* a continuation of the discussion begun in the Critical Cluster “Historical Romance Linguistics: The Death of a Discipline?” which appeared in Spring 2003. That first collection of thirteen papers was followed by an excellent overview and thoughtful response from the pen of Martin Maiden (2004) who, although invited, had been unable to contribute an essay to the original project. In order to sustain the momentum generated by that Cluster, George Greenia and I invited another group of active European and North American practitioners of historical Romance linguistics to submit essays in which they could respond to the Cluster as a whole or to individual pieces; alternatively they could take up from other perspectives the issues posed by the admittedly tendentious question posed about the fear of the demise of our discipline. The twelve studies that follow in these pages represent the fruits of this new venture.

As I noted in my introductory essay to the 2003 Cluster, the debate surrounding the vitality and future of historical Romance linguistics and its need to forge stronger links with general linguistics has not been limited to the pages of *La corónica*. Several of the contributors to this present Forum note that eminent Romanists were voicing concern over the discipline’s long-term future as early as the 1970s. John Green refers the reader to concerns voiced by Yakov Malkiel and Rebecca Posner, while Emilio Ridruejo and Pedro Álvarez de Miranda report the relevant opinions of Germán de Granda Gutiérrez and Diego Catalán respectively. Franz Lebsanft notes (with the appropriate bibliographic references) that German Romanists have been debating

the position and status of Romance linguistics regularly over the last twenty years, especially with regard to the future of *Romanistik* in the framework of the major reforms being undertaken in the academic programs of German universities.

Especially important is the debate played out recently in the pages of *Romanische Forschungen* between Jurgen Meisel and Christoph Schwarze (2003) on the one hand and Johannes Kramer (2004) on the other. The former take the view that Romance linguistics should focus primarily on the grammatical and cognitive aspects of language, and should consider itself part of general linguistics if it wishes to have any impact outside of German-speaking Europe. Kramer takes a different tack, standing up for a “linguistische Romanistik” rather than the “romanische Linguistik” advocated by Meisel and Schwarze. For Kramer, linguistic-based *Romanistik*, while cognizant of and profiting from advances in linguistic theory, has as its primary goal the analysis of Romance texts in order to offer access to the peoples and cultures of the ROMANIA: “sprachliche Zugänge zu den Menschen und ihrer Kultur zu öffnen, die Roms direkte Erben sind” (73).¹ Ridruejo also raises the issue of the impact of the much heralded 1999 Bologna Declaration signed by no fewer than twenty-nine European countries whose long-term goal is to harmonize university education in the European Union – with the underlying model being the university as configured in the United States.²

As was the case in the original Cluster, the contributors to the Forum in this issue reflect both on the direction and quality of current research in historical Romance linguistics and its current situation as a discipline in the humanistic curricula of North American and European universities. David Pharies attributes the decline of the field in US graduate programs to the outdated way it has been presented to our students. To date no North American specialist in historical Romance linguistics has authored a textbook that could make this now rigorous subject matter and unfamiliar scientific method accessible and attractive to a fresh crop of potential contributors. Research scholars tend to look down their noses at the writing of textbooks (an activity devalued

¹ In addition to the essays cited by Lebsanft, the reader may wish to see the complementary studies of Schlieben-Lange 1999, Dietrich 2000, and Lentzen 2000.

² See Loporcaro 2005, who discusses Romance linguistics within the framework of the “reformed university” in the course of his review of Renzi and Andreose 2003. On the Bologna Declaration see Aisha Labi, “European Universities Move to Standardize Ph.D. Programs” in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (5/7/2004).

by many promotion and salary committees as well), and as a result, Pharies remarks, “we have completely ignored the question of creating a new generation of American scholars...”³

Douglas C. Walker attempts to explain why research in Romance linguistics continues to flourish in US and Canadian universities despite the severe retrenchment of graduate programs in those fields. He finds one answer in the comparative and interdisciplinary nature of the Romance branch of the discipline and in its importance to a number of related fields, especially to general linguistics. Franz Lebsanft offers his insights from the perspective of the German academy on the discrepancy between the vitality and excellence of current research in historical Romance linguistics and its uncertain institutional status in both Europe and the US. For their part, José Luis Girón Alconchel and Emilio Ridruejo both comment on the decline of “Lingüística Románica” (as distinct from “Filología Hispánica”) as a field of study (*titulación*) in Spanish universities today.

The majority of the participants in this Forum have chosen to stress the dynamic and innovative research which characterizes the field and its relationship with general linguistics. Grammaticalization theory, typology and cognitive linguistics, all potentially valuable analytical tools for historical Romance linguistics, require perforce a comparative approach within and beyond the confines of individual language families.

Taking as her starting point her 2003 dissertation on the history of verbs of motion, Natalya Stolova shows how theoretical models of grammaticalization will give Romanists the opportunity to engage in fruitful dialogue with their generalist colleagues and how it will force specialists in individual languages to return to a comparative historical approach. José Luis Girón Alconchel discusses how our sector of the profession has made excellent use of the insights into language change provided by grammaticalization, by variational sociolinguistics, and by the study of discourse traditions and pragmatics from an historical perspective. For her part, Rocío Caravedo explores the links between our panhistorical sector of research and variationist sociolinguistic theory as expounded by William Labov and James and Lesley Milroy.

Concepción Company examines in searching detail the reasons why syntax was for so long relegated to a secondary position in

³ German and Spanish publishers regularly commission leading specialists to prepare textbooks for use in introductory courses in historical Romance linguistics or in the history of an individual Romance language.

diachronic Romance studies and why it has now become the most flourishing research target in the field once again due to startling advances in the theory of grammaticalization. Only Pedro Álvarez de Miranda among our present contributors chooses to focus specifically on what remains to be done in the area of Spanish diachronic lexicology and lexicography.

Opening up new horizons for us is Rolf Eberenz who offers a thoughtful and insightful meditation on the ideologies and practices observable in the discipline known as *Historia de la Lengua* (as opposed to *Gramática Histórica*) which he defines as the description and interpretation of all aspects of the social and linguistic evolution which lead to the constitution of the current state of the language under study. European language histories traditionally focus on those systems which are (or at some moment in their history were) the vehicles for a well-developed literary culture. He discusses how such pursuits as the analysis of spoken discourse, sociolinguistics and pragmatics, usually associated with synchronic linguistics, can throw new light on the processes brought into convergence under the aegis of a reconceived *Historia de la Lengua*. Readers of *La corónica* will be grateful to learn that Eberenz is preparing a special monographic issue (with all invited contributions in Spanish) of the German journal *Iberoromania* on the topic of the historiography of the Spanish language.

While conceding that traditional comparative historical Romance linguistics may be virtually dead in North American universities, John Lipski seeks to identify new and promising research paradigms currently being carried with an historical and comparative slant out for the heirs and successors of Latin. Much of the relevant work is devoted to varieties of Spanish, Portuguese, French and Italian spoken outside of Europe. Lipski identifies as one of the highest research priorities that should command our attention the assembly of a comprehensive history of colonial Latin American Spanish, a field now being studied not only by those Latin American experts explicitly named by Lipski, but also by European Romanists such as Jens Lüdtke, Andreas Wesch and Johannes Kabatek (with regard to Brazilian Portuguese).

In the course of surveying the curricular health of our discipline in the universities of the United Kingdom, John Green raises one particular issue not touched upon by any of the other participants in the earlier Cluster or in this current Forum. He wonders whether the absence of studies dealing with Romance data in recent European collaborative volumes on phonology, morphology and typology is due at least in part to the propensity of continental Romanists to publish

in one of the modern Romance languages. And our German, Austrian and Swiss colleagues often prefer to write in German, admittedly the scholarly language of nineteenth-century Romance linguistics which was historical by definition. Whether one likes it or not, English today has become the international language of general linguistics. But English language essays are not accepted in some of the best established and most widely read journals that are pan-Romance in scope, such as the *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* or the *Revue de linguistique romane*. Their pages are effectively closed to many general linguists who may have valuable analyses of Romance data that they would like to share in an open forum with their Romanist colleagues. I realize that there are touchy political and social issues involved, but is this unwillingness to use English hurting the ability of Romance scholars to transmit their findings to many of their colleagues in general linguistics and make space for the work of these generalists in the pages of their proprietary journals? Is their continued reliance on German restricting the diffusion and therefore the potential impact of much of their important and valuable work on their colleagues in both Romance and general linguistics? It is a sad fact that many Romanists outside German-speaking Europe no longer read that language, or do so only with considerable difficulty and at rare intervals. I am not seeking here to suggest the imposition of English as the language of Romance linguistics or to restrict the use of German as a scholarly vehicle with a long and proud tradition in Romance studies, much less to question the currency of Romance languages as a medium for the exchange of research. But the realities of international communication with scholars in general linguistics cannot be ignored.

Green offers another telling insight when he accurately points out that almost all the contributors to the original Cluster are middle-aged scholars. I alone must take full responsibility for the selection of the participants, as I was seeking the views of the discipline's veterans. In like fashion, I think that I am on safe ground in stating that, with few exceptions, the contributors to this current Forum are all over the age of fifty. We've spoken our piece, and now it's the turn of younger scholars. I wish to take this opportunity, on behalf of George Greenia and myself, to invite the emerging generation of Romance scholars and linguists to continue this discussion on the status and future of historical Romance linguistics in future issues of *La corónica*.

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