

# The Impact of Generative Grammar on Traditional Issues in Romance Philology

Before discussing the central issues on which these pages will concentrate, I shall make some general considerations regarding the aims of historical linguistics. In this way, it will be easy to isolate the major achievements made by the work which has been done within the generative approach. It will also help us to look into the pregenerative philological work in a more insightful manner.

Historical linguistics proposes to account for historical change. Although I shall limit myself here to historical phonology, I must point out that generative grammar is concerned with the complete grammar of a language. This is a crucial point for linguistic reconstruction, whether diachronic or synchronic.<sup>1</sup> The analysis of the data at each specific level—let us say at the phonological—brings into consideration significant questions regarding other grammatical levels. A good example of the relevance of this kind of interaction is provided by Selkirk's study on synchronic French, "French Liaison and the X Notation";<sup>2</sup> there, phonological evidence is provided in order to argue in favor of a certain syntactic structure.

The great philological studies of Romance languages which we have from the past did not consider the written material to be the reflection of a grammar in which the various components were interacting and producing that particular grammar. Therefore, they did not try to reconstruct the structure—the syntagmatic part of the grammar. They were mainly interested in the changes in the words—the paradigmatic part of the grammar. Even when they looked into syntactic and phonological changes, the lack of a sufficiently restricted theory led them to simply list changes, mixing relevant and irrelevant information.

Another set of problems has arisen in the account which philologists have made of the Romance languages spoken in the Iberian Peninsula, specifically Spanish and Portuguese. Without a precise notion of the markedness of the sounds, philologists have postulated the spreading of some very marked sounds when, in fact, the history of Spanish can be accounted for without this spreading.<sup>3</sup> For example, Pidal's thesis on the priority of Castilian (the Spanish spoken in the area of Burgos around the 15th century) over Spanish (the Spanish spoken in the area of Toledo around the same time), relies upon this kind of fact. Specifically, it seems implausible that the apicalization that characterizes the Castilian *s* (/s/) was ever part of the system of non-Castilian Spanish.<sup>4</sup> In order to explain why this is so, I must introduce another inherent assumption of generative phonology: rule ordering.

Rule ordering is particularly relevant to the reconstruction of historical change. Phonological rules operate upon structures created by other phonological rules. Therefore in order to recover the lost structure one must determine the order in which rules apply. The handling of rule ordering has proved to be one of the keys toward the understanding of the development of Romance languages. Since Latin is the common ancestor of all these languages, evidence available in any Romance language at a particular stage is extremely helpful in tracing earlier stages of these languages. For example, Otero makes use of contemporary French to establish the relative order in which the processes of diphthongization and reduction of geminate consonant clusters have occurred in Romance.<sup>5</sup> He notes that French, but not Italian, has simplified identical double consonants. Furthermore, he finds that the words which have geminates in Italian do not have French counterparts with a diphthong (from *mele*, French *miel*). Otero correctly concludes that the diphthongization occurred *before* simplification of geminate consonants.

This result demonstrates to what extent a systematic approach can guide the investigation of linguistic change. Of course, not all the changes are necessarily present in the grammar. On the one hand, one is dealing with written texts, whereas, on the other, a particular change can lack the link that joins two different processes. For example, by looking at the history of the internal grammar of Spanish in isolation, as most of the philologists working in the pre-generative period did, one could never have reached the chronological order to that series of changes. Comparative reconstruction turns out to be an integral part of the process of reconstruction in historical linguistics.

A generative approach to historical linguistics also tells us what sort of change it is plausible to expect, if not reflected in the texts. When confronted with several stages of certain phonological changes, one can determine, by working within a proper theory, which change is the result of a natural evolution—an innovation with respect to the older form—and which is an archaism. This must be kept in mind when dealing with the philological work that we have inherited from the past. For instance, Sephardic Spanish lacks several phonological changes which we find in Castilian from the very beginning and in meridional Spanish much later (also, in late Gallegan). At the same time, Sephardic seems to have undergone certain phonological processes that are found neither in Spanish nor in Castilian.

It is the phonological nature of each series of changes that determines the archaic or progressive character of a language. In the case of Sephardic Spanish, contrary to what has been claimed in the past, the phonological system seems to indicate that the language has reached a more developed stage in its evolution than—for example, the Castilian dialect. Thus, Sephardic Spanish lacks several phonological processes that crucially characterize Castilian: apicalization of *s*, devoicing of sibilants, velarization of the palatal-alveolar-fricative *ʃ*, etc.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the raising of the final vowels (in this position, reducing the vocalic

system to three more universal vowels *a/i/u*), and several other characteristics that tend to open syllables (the optimum structure of the syllable, according to Jakobson) that characterize Sephardic Spanish would confirm the indicated phonological direction of the system.

Let us return to the question of the Castilian apical *s*. A discussion of the spreading/non-spreading of apical *s* will demonstrate how phonological theory can help us postulate simple and plausible hypotheses.

Although *s* is one of the basic consonants of the system of obstruents and is marked only with respect to one feature, apical *s* is a relatively odd, marked sound within the phonological system of Romance languages. It is found in the system of Basque, but however, and, given the proximity between the Basque and Castilian territories, it can be inferred that Castilian adopted it under Basque influence.<sup>7</sup> Once apical *s* was incorporated into Castilian, the system of sibilants of this dialect possessed three very close elements: common *s*, apical *s* /*š*/, and the palatal-alveolar *s* /*š̄*/. That the new group should redistribute its elements in a different way is not surprising considering the difficulty in maintaining a distinction in the pronunciation of these three sounds and, similarly, the difficulty in their perception. In phonological terms, then, one can say that the output of the rule that introduced the apicality in the Castilian *s* contributed decisively to the later process which separates these three sibilants into the velar *j* /*x*/, on the one hand, and the interdental /*θ*/ and the apical *s* /*š*/ on the other.

Given the history of the derivation just described, it is not plausible to start with the claim that apical *s* has spread over the rest of the Spanish speaking areas of the Peninsula, as Amado Alonso does.<sup>8</sup> As we have said before, Sephardic Spanish lacks apical *s* and the later related processes that give rise to /*θ*/ and /*x*/ in the system. By having known the phonological changes that the incorporation of a certain rule may introduce into the phonological system of a language, misleading issues such as the spreading of Castilian apical *s* could have been avoided.

Another of the important contributions of the generative approach to the history of the Romance languages spoken in the Peninsula (Spanish and Portuguese, in particular) is the relation between ordered rules, a relation that is fundamental to the investigation of the relative chronology of a series of changes within a given language.

In the history of Spanish and Portuguese, certain words have undergone a process by which a final vowel *e* has been lost in certain phonological environments. We shall refer to this as the rule of 'apocope.'

As often happens in the investigation of historical grammar, data with respect to specific changes at first seem contradictory. We look for phonological changes expecting to find regularity, but sometimes this regularity is hidden because it is difficult to fix the exact environment in which the process has taken place. This is precisely the case with the rule of 'apocope.'<sup>9</sup> We observe that contemporary Portuguese and Gallegan have words where a final *e* has not been dropped, in contrast

to the corresponding word in Spanish. Cases of this sort are 'lealtade', 'realidade', 'paredé', (Portuguese and Gallegan), versus Spanish 'lealtad', 'realidad', 'pared'. On the other hand, Gallegan and Portuguese, together with Spanish, have no final *e* in words like 'sin' and 'compartir'.

At this point, it is useful to note that several processes may affect the same words, in which case, determining the particular order in which they have appeared is crucial. For instance, in earlier Spanish there was a rule that voiced obstruents in the context of a preceding vowel and a following sonorant: from Latin 'delikatu', Spanish 'delgado'. An earlier process, however, had occurred in the language—the dropping of an internal vowel in a certain environment. Consequently, the forms to which this later process applied would never have served as inputs to the later voicing rule: from Latin 'solitariu', Spanish 'soltero'. In other words, the rule that changed Latin 'solitariu' to Spanish 'soltero' *bled* the rule which voiced intervocalic obstruents.

This type of relationship between rules has received a lot of attention in the framework of generative phonology because it significantly contributes to the traditional problem of dating different changes.<sup>10</sup>

A similar type of relation, *feeding order*, is found between many other rules. Bleeding, as well as feeding relationships are considered unmarked, as opposed to the marked orders of counterfeeding and counterbleeding.<sup>11</sup> This means, among other things, that we can expect to find these orderings quite frequently applying in languages.

These notions have been very useful in clarifying problematic derivations in the history of Romance. For example, some Portuguese words have derived a voiced intervocalic consonant in cases in which, apparently, the environment of the rule discussed earlier was not met. Actually, the Spanish reflexes of those words have instead a voiceless intervocalic obstruent: Portuguese 'saiba'/Spanish 'sapia'.<sup>12</sup> By examining the history of these forms, the problem can be resolved with a simple reordering in the application of two rules. Otero proposes that the rule which in Spanish proposed a semi-vowel (from *sapia* to *saipa*) occurred after the voicing of the obstruent. In this way, the form 'sapia' meets the environment of the voicing rule, giving rise to the actual form 'sabria'. In technical terms, then, we may say that the rule which changed the position of semi-vowels bleeds the rule of voicing.

Another important discovery has shed light on a question that arises concerning the conversion of intervocalic voiceless obstruents into voiced ones. This discovery certainly occupies a central position in the work of traditional philology.

Apparently contradictory data in the derivation of Latin words with *ti*, such as *potium* / *rationem* led some philologists to the conclusion that this sequence always had a voiceless reflex in Spanish.<sup>13</sup> However, words like Spanish 'razón' show that this is not correct. It seems that a 'bleeding relation' between two rules has given rise to two different results in Spanish from a common Latin sequence.<sup>14</sup> Otero claims that

words like *rationem* have not undergone the process which would have produced geminate consonants in a certain environment, as words like *potium* or *ericium* have. The application of the rules would crucially depend on the position of the stress. Thus, the rule that changes intervocalic voiceless obstruents into voiced ones could not apply to those words which have geminate consonants. Now, both Spanish 'razón' and 'pozo' or 'erizo' can be derived in a natural way.

Once again, the tools that a generative approach provides have permitted us to establish the links among different rules and to finally obtain an acceptable result.

Turning our attention back to the corpus of data regarding 'apocope', we find that it is necessary to write the rule so that it will correctly derive 'lealtade' and, at the same time, 'compartir'. Again, the framework of generative grammar offers a solution to this intricate problem. In generative phonology, rules operate upon structures created by other rules. Therefore, if a language lacks a rule that appears in a sister language, the application of later related rules will give different results in the two languages.

This is precisely the situation which seems to be involved in the dropping of final *e* (apocope) in certain Spanish and Portuguese words. Spanish, but not Portuguese, would have undergone 'spirantization'. The formulation of the rule of 'apocope' should consequently include the feature 'fricative', which, in fact, is the output of the 'spirantization' rule. Thus, by ordering 'apocope' and 'spirantization' in a feeding relation, one would correctly obtain the Spanish reflexes 'mar', 'mes', and 'bondad' (and 'pez') and the Portuguese 'amar', 'mes'—but 'bondade'.<sup>15</sup>

Two conceptual tools have proved to be crucially involved in the treatment of this issue: derivative application of phonological rules and rule ordering. As one can see, this type of reconstruction is unlikely to be made in a pre-generative approach. Amado Alonso has done an enormous amount of work and still has left the matter at a rather undeveloped stage. Naturally, this is not to say that a *restricted* theory of grammar inevitably leads one to great discoveries; there is, of course, considerable variety among the works conducted within the framework of generative grammar.<sup>16</sup> The reverse, however, is true, for without a *restricted* theory of grammar, it is unusual to go beyond observational adequacy.

The previously discussed formulation of 'apocope' has immediate repercussions for the chronology of the 'spirantization' rule. Tracing the relation between these two rules, one is led to argue that if 'apocope' applies after 'spirantization', and we find evidence of 'apocope' in early texts ('dolor', 'nol', 'sin', for example, in the 12th century *Mio Cid*), we know that 'spirantization' cannot have taken place at the time in which, presumably, a later rule such as 'denasalization' was occurring in Gallegan.<sup>17</sup>

There are a few more observations to be made regarding the ordering relation between 'apocope' and the rule which eliminates intervocalic

*l* in Portuguese. Looking at Portuguese pairs such as 'facil'/'faceis', we observe that while the singular form has preserved the final *l*, its plural form has not. Therefore, one can rely upon this type of data to conclude that 'apocope' took place before intervocalic *l* was dropped by the corresponding rule.

Yet because rules interact with one another, this conclusion also has consequences for another important change that occurred in Portuguese —intervocalic nasalization. According to Otero's well-founded argumentation, the rule that nasalized vowels in Portuguese has to occur before 'apocope'; evidence of this can be found in words like Portuguese 'nome', instead of 'nomen'. Since nasalization must precede 'apocope', and since we have already seen that 'apocope' precedes the rule that deletes intervocalic *l*, we can conclude that 'nasalization' must precede the rule that drops intervocalic *l*.

This is, admittedly, an extremely sketchy account; other major discoveries in the history of the Romance languages have been made within the generative approach (rules to derive phonological processes in Provençal, the Romance stress system and the Romance vocalic system to name a few).

Since our current state of knowledge of historical grammar is by no means complete, it is time to take advantage of the rigorous philological work found in our tradition and to restate, and answer, if possible, the hundreds of questions posed by past grammars of the Romance languages. The works discussed here are among those that have opened the way.

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#### NOTES

1. See David W. Lighthfoot, *Principles of Diachronic Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) for a systematic account of syntactic change. This study also serves as a guide to historical linguistics in general and offers much about the theory of generative grammar.

2. Elisabeth Selkirk: "French Liaison and the  $\bar{X}$  Notation", *Linguistic Inquiry* 5 (1974), 573-90.

3. On the notion of markedness, see Noam Chomsky and Morris Halle, *The Sound Patterns of English* (New York: Harper, 1968). Also, James Harris: "Sound Change in Spanish and the Theory of Markedness", *Language* 45 (1969), 538-52.

4. See Carlos Otero: *Evolución y revolución en romance* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1971) and Carlos Otero: *Evolución y revolución en romance II* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1976) for the presentation and discussion of this issue. The reader is also referred to J. Harris: *Spanish Phonology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969). The Spanish translation *Fonología generativa del español* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1973, trad. de A. Verde) contains an important Appendix not found in the English version of the book.

5. See Carlos Otero: *Evolución II*, cit.
6. I am following C. Otero's *Evolución I* and *II*, cit.
7. See Ramón Menéndez Pidal: *En torno a la lengua vasca* (Buenos Aires: Espasa Calpe, 1962), p. 61. In this work, Menéndez Pidal gives an overview of the influence of Basque on Spanish -i.e. Castilian. Otero in *Evolución I* and *II* elaborates extensively on this point. Basing his argumentation on linguistic grounds, he shows the various implications of the Basque influence on the history of Spanish in general. This is a very important issue in Otero's book, and the reader is advised to examine the relevant passages concerning this question in *Evolución*.
8. See Amado Alonso: *De la pronunciación medieval a la moderna en español* (Madrid: Gredos, 1955) and Menéndez Pidal: *Orígenes del español*. Estadio lingüístico de la Península Ibérica hasta el siglo XI. (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1950).
9. A thorough account of this issue is found in Rafael Lapesa: "La apócope de la vocal en castellano antiguo. Intento de explicación histórica", in *Estudios dedicados a Menéndez Pidal*, tomo II. C.S.I.C., Madrid (1951), 185-226.
10. See Noam Chomsky: "Some General Properties of Phonological Rules", *Language* 43 (1967), 101-28; also, N. Chomsky and M. Halle, *The Sound Patterns of English*, cit., and Stephen R. Anderson: *The Organization of Phonology* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).
11. Feeding and bleeding relations are defined in Paul Kiparsky: "Linguistic Universals and Linguistic Change" in *Universals in Linguistic Theory*, ed. by E. Bach and R. Harms (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 171-202.
12. I am following C. Otero: *Evolución II*, cit.
13. See R. Menéndez Pidal, *Manual de gramática histórica española* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1904).
14. See C. Otero: *Evolución II*, cit.
15. See J. Harris: "Evidence from Portuguese for the 'Elsewhere Condition' in Phonology", *Linguistic Inquiry* 5 (1974), 61-80. Also, see Otero's tentative approach to the problem in *Evolución I*, cit.
16. One can judge for oneself by examining the several works dealing with historical linguistics within a generative approach.
17. I take the argumentation of this issue from C. Otero: *Evolución I* and *II*, cit.
18. I am much indebted to Diana Platt for stimulating discussions of some of the issues presented here and for her valuable comments on a draft of these pages. Judith Mc A'Nulty made several suggestions regarding the distribution of the content when she read the first draft.