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Author

Otero, Carlos-Peregrín

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Romance scholarship: Current perspectives*

Any student of Romance linguistics and literature, including those who have been teachers for many years, is easily bewildered by the sheer volume of printed material which is taken to constitute the legacy of Romance scholarship to date, a volume of material which keeps proliferating faster than the most avid reader could possibly desire. But he is even more easily bewildered by the conflicting methods, views, aims, conclusions and terminologies of the numerous authors he is tacitly or explicitly invited to take as models or at least as reliable points of departure. This situation might very well prove insurmountable for the beginner, especially if he is told, as is often the case, that "apprentices in the Romance field have to become acquainted with [the] vast amount of work done by their predecessors" (Possner, 412).

Given that it is materially impossible for any student to read during his short graduate years the vast amount of material accumulated to date, he must necessarily be selective from the start if he is to accomplish something in his lifetime. However, at present there is no effective way of discriminating between the research (old or new) which represents a real contribution or at least a step forward and that which is devoid of content or which leads to a blind alley and can only have antiquarian interest (when it is old enough). It seems that most historians of Romance scholarship tend to show far greater interest in finding out and giving a precisely accurate account of what the thinking of their predecessors was than in looking at their work, as the art lover does, to try to find in it something which is still of value in itself, not as a mere relic of the past, something that perhaps obtains part of its value because it represents the gropings of earlier generations, within the limitations of their time, toward concepts, ideas and insights which were to be developed years, perhaps centuries, later. A good example of this approach is Professor Richard Ogle's recent UCLA dissertation on the history of the notion of natural order in syntax, which, incidentally, includes an extensive discussion of much Romance scholarship rarely, if ever, encountered in the publications of most contemporary Romance scholars. In fact, for over a century Romance scholarship has usually been defined so narrowly that it has excluded even true "classics," such as Beauzée, Soares Barbosa or Bello, although these excluded classics could provide a far better point of departure than many writings recommended far more often. What is worse, it is not rare to discover that some of the most insightful and possibly helpful contributions within the more narrowly defined Romance tradition do not find their way to those disheartening reading lists dreaded by many students, not infrequently the best and most creative, who, understandably enough, are the ones least eager to plunge head on into the bottomless pit of erudition.

This imbalance and the difficulties of selecting from such a vast and diverse array of materials will be corrected, hopefully, in the near future. The very real progress made by linguistics in recent years, the new levels of sophistication reached by the best linguistic research, and the resulting new perspective on the past have recently sparked a new and, to my mind, very healthy interest in the history of the field which, no doubt, will result in a serious effort to reevaluate the works of our predecessors on their real merits rather than on their presumed authority, using as a yardstick a holistic theory of grammar in which phonology and morphology appear in their proper place, rather than stealing the center of attention. For the moment, however, this falls within the class of desiderata, so the student who is confronted with the present, intractable situation and the urgency to begin somewhere will have to turn for advice to anyone who can be of help. In the somewhat confused state of affairs that still seems to prevail today, there is no easy answer for many of his possible questions, but precisely for this reason it is all the more imperative for the responsible teacher to try to delimit at least some firm ground and to tentatively chart a fairly safe and potentially creative course. There is no question that this is, at the moment, an extremely hazardous enterprise, laden with perhaps

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insurmountable difficulties, but the risks have to be taken. My hope is that what I'm about to say will qualify as a fairly noncontroversial and positive contribution, no matter how modest, toward the desirable goal.

The increasing appeal of linguistics as an undergraduate subject, which is likely to continue, at least for some time, and the new trends towards interdisciplinary studies, are making it necessary for the language teacher and the literature teacher to face problems practically nonexistent a few years ago. Chances are that sooner or later the teacher will have in his classes students who already have a fairly good grasp of some basic results obtained in the study of language and who will not be satisfied with less rigorous explanations. The situation might be even more uncomfortable at the university level. The only way for the would be teacher to avoid embarrassment is for him to become acquainted from the start with the most essential features of the Chomskian system of concepts, often found in current basic publications on language and literature, and which seems to be here to stay. If a fair degree of familiarity with the basic concepts and results of present-day linguistics is highly recommendable for any teacher seriously concerned with his professional competence, it is an inescapable duty for the Romanist concerned with the future of his discipline, as Professor Rebecca Possner argues in the concluding section on the prospects of Romance linguistics which closes her revision of the Jordan-Orr introductory manual:

Certainly [she writes] the requirement for more technical know-how and more 'professionalism' in present-day linguistics . . . can tempt Romanists to abandon interest in modern developments, as being outside their competence. My own feeling is that this would in the long run be fatal to Romance linguistics, which would fail to attract talented theory-oriented younger scholars and so gradually fade out. There must therefore be encouraged, within the Romanist sphere, the existence of scholars who are primarily linguists. . . . concerned primarily with theory and methodology but with special interest in the Romance languages (539).

One might object to the apparent implication that it is natural for Romance scholars who are not primarily linguists to abandon interest in modern developments, but one can hardly object to the idea that Romance scholarship cannot afford to turn its back on methodology and theory. In particular, a mastery of the best established principles, techniques and results is a requirement *sine qua non* for every creative student who is willing to take advantage of the fact that, as Professor Possner appropriately points out, the well-documented Romance languages can provide an excellent "testing ground for hypotheses about language development and structure" (540).

This is not to say a student should be ready to believe that anything written in the last few years is necessarily more worthwhile reading than something written years or even centuries ago. Every piece of work should be judged on its merits, since papers of recent date might very well make less sense than much older ones. It is true that a discovery presented in a systematic and precise way is usually far more reliable and illuminating than a proposal which is not clear and explicit, but fancy notational flourish is no substitute for insight, even for poorly articulated insight, old or new. Being old-fashioned in preferring old insight to recent fancy nonsense will do no harm to Romance scholarship. What can do real harm to it and lead directly to a serious crisis is the old-fashionedness of being "somewhat outside the mainstream of developments in contemporary linguistic theory," as Romance scholarship is or has been, if we are to believe Professor Stephen Ullman, quoted by Professor Possner in a footnote to the following passage:

. . . Romanists unite to bewail the crisis that their discipline is passing through. The symptoms are not hard to see: the prestige that once attached to Romance linguists is lost, and now accrues to the more theoretically minded 'scientific' linguists . . . The Romanist, in objecting to new trends, is often put in the position of the testy old man who cannot keep up with activities of nimbler youth. In short, Romance linguists often appears old-fashioned, a refuge for the slower-witted but conscientious academic 'swot' (411-12).

(It should perhaps be pointed out that 'swot', an alteration of 'sweat', is a British term for 'grind', meaning 'a student who has to go through an excessively tedious and unrewarding labour or routine'.)

In my view, the complicated etiology of this crisis is buried deep in the past, even though the symptoms are perhaps more visible now than before. Looking at the intellectual history of the last five hundred years from the vantage point of what seems best established today, it is not difficult to identify at least three causes which have no doubt contributed their share to the present abnormal

condition bewailed by Professor Possner. These three causes are, in a nutshell, the following tendencies: First, the tendency to lose sight of the unity of scientific inquiry; second, the tendency to lose sight of the unity of linguistic inquiry; and, third, the tendency to lose sight of the unity of grammatical inquiry. To these tendencies toward disintegration we could still add the tendency to believe that most aspects of the study of literature do not require a solid linguistic foundation, an idea which often goes unchallenged nowadays. I would like to make a few observations about each of these tendencies.

The first one, which is responsible for the split between the so-called "two cultures", seems to have put the humanities, and not only Romance scholarship, on the wrong course more than once. It may very well be that truly creative discovery in the humanities is less within reach of humans than discovery in the natural sciences, but there is no question that the basic methodology is essentially the same, and so is the basic goal. This common goal is the construction of empirical theories based on reliable and significant evidence by means of sound argumentation. It goes without saying that this doesn't mean the humanities (including the so called "social sciences") should do no more than imitate the surface features of the natural sciences and simply borrow their terms. It is not a question of working within the framework of the natural sciences, but rather on the analogy of the natural sciences—a very different matter. Surely, the basic methodology of rational inquiry, and in particular, the need for adequate evidence and sound argumentation, cannot change when one moves beyond the natural sciences in the narrow sense. I take this to be fairly noncontroversial.

I would hope also that the following principle is fairly noncontroversial: Meaningful research can only be carried out within the framework of a precise theory which defines a system of basic concepts. In the particular case of language, some of these concepts might in fact be very close to concepts already found in traditional grammar, for example, concepts such as "sentence", "phrase", "noun", "verb", "main clause", "anaphora", etc.; other concepts, for example "bound trace", might be only three or four years old. One thing that seems clear is that the general theory of language has to go far beyond what can be found in the traditional reservoirs of Romance scholarship in the widest sense.

This is because of the second tendency I referred to above, the tendency to lose sight of the fundamental unity of linguistic inquiry. Romance scholars have often been too given either to parochialism or to versatility of the shallowest kind. However, usually the most valuable and deepest results are not obtained through samplings quickly gathered from an array of languages, but rather through sustained effort in the study of a single system. It is no accident that there is no Romance counterpart to Otto Jespersen, who so clearly followed in the footsteps of Wilhelm von Humboldt.

In fact, if my information is complete enough, only one Romance scholar, Andreas Blinkenberg, who happens to be Danish also, can be said to have been considerably influenced by the great Jespersen. I should point out here that Jespersen's 1924 masterpiece *The Philosophy of Grammar*, of very general interest even today, is not even mentioned in the Romance introductory manuals, although many of his chapters, for example those on time and tense or direct and indirect speech, can be of greater help to the Romance student than most things done within Romance, even in very recent years. This is also true of many chapters of the *Minerva*, published in 1587, but the name of Sanctius is rarely to be found in the usual registers of Romance scholarship, nor is it less rare to find those of his most accomplished followers, although they were clearly doing Romance linguistics. It seems that most Romance scholars have always been too eager to cash in on the easiest returns, often overlooking the richer and potentially more productive ideas. Even Hugo Schuchardt, who is without question one of the most theoretically inclined and open-minded Romance scholars, seems to be at his best within fairly narrow confines of limited provinces of grammar. And yet without a general theory of language true discoveries are so unlikely that one could say they are virtually out of reach. An obvious reason for this need for a general theory is that every Romance speaker acquires without difficulty a rich and highly intricate and complex system that is hopelessly undetermined by the fragmentary evidence available to him, which is compatible with far too many possible explanatory theories, mutually inconsistent but adequate to the data. Since the Romance language learners succeed in reconstructing at least one such system in a highly uniform way, it follows that they are naturally endowed with a system of principles which guide them as they proceed without their being conscious of it. Unfortunately for Romance linguistics, these principles are not directly available to the conscious mind, nor are they reachable through introspection. They can only be discovered the hard way, in

the course of successful empirical research. This is one more reason why scientific inquiry into the nature of language is so difficult and so limited in its results, even when carried out within the framework of a fairly developed general theory.

With all this in mind it is easy to see that to ignore the major gains that have been made in the theory of language is enough to jeopardize the very possibility of success in the Romance field. On the other hand, the data from any language may lead to disconfirming or revising the general theory, since this theory must be consistent with each and every language. Ideally, then, the most ambitious research on a particular Romance language should have a dual purpose: On the one hand, the discovery of a particular grammar with the help of linguistic theory, thus contributing also to a general Romance grammar; on the other, the testing of a general theory or subtheory against every sort of crucial evidence found in the language under investigation, in particular against evidence which is peculiar to that language (for example, the agreement of infinitive forms in Portuguese).

This brings us to the third tendency towards disintegration, to lose sight of the fundamental unity of the grammar of a language. As with the blind man of the story, the student who doesn't have a perspective on the whole system might take the trunk of the elephant to be a tail, or, even worse, he might take a limb to be a central part of the body—or even a wall. This tendency to forget that everything in the grammar is part of a single intricate system, and that some parts are more central than others, is to a great extent a consequence of the remarkable early successes of Indo-European historical phonology, which made use of an extremely rudimentary concept of language that unfortunately became virtually dominant in Romance scholarship in the narrow sense down to our own day. Rudimentary not only in relation to later conceptions, but also in relation to conceptions of the early XIX century and before. Thus, in the very years that saw the publication of Diez's comparative grammar, his contemporary Andrés Bello, born in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1785, conceived the grammar of a language in a way that can be construed as a fairly clear anticipation of very recent conceptions, as was pointed out in the journal *Romance Philology* about ten years ago. For Bello, a grammar of Spanish is "a theory which brings out the system of the particular language in the generation . . . of its inflections and in the structure of its sentences, free from certain Latin traditions which do not fit it at all" (IV, p. 9). He goes on to clarify that by "theory" he doesn't mean "metaphysical speculation" (elsewhere he says that a theory is "una visión intelectual de la realidad de las cosas", an intellectual conception of the reality of things). In an earlier work on time and tense he had already written that the meanings of the verb forms "present a chaos in which everything seems arbitrary, irregular and whimsical, but in the light of the analysis this apparent disorder disappears and in its place one sees a system of general laws which operate with absolute uniformity and that can even be expressed in rigorous formulations which combine and decompose like the algebraic ones". (See Otero, *Introducción*, I.9.) There is no question that for Bello a theory of grammar is an empirical theory. Paraphrasing Professor Possner (412) one could say that Bello would agree that open-air fieldwork and dusty and nondusty manuscripts and publications cannot safely be replaced by armchair speculation (as is often so typical among some of those often taken as authorities, if one may be allowed to turn Professor Possner's focus around), nor can inexplicit and unargued pronouncements be a substitute for a careful working out of the problems and a clear and precise presentation of the results. Even the problems posed by the study of syntax, which appears to be the central component of a grammar, are no longer beyond the scope of the technique and understanding available, as they have been for years.

In particular, the problem of rule-governed creativity in language simply could not be formulated with sufficient precision to permit research to proceed very far, a situation which didn't change radically until the second half of this century. Whether the extremely narrow range of many Romance scholars was or was not justified in the past, today it would be completely anachronistic. But even within the confines of historical phonology the results of many years of work have left many things undone, among them some that are rather elementary, judging by some ideas not found in the literature until the 1970's. This is no doubt related to the lack of a sufficiently developed theoretical framework even for phonology.

It seems to me that the lesson one can learn from all this is that the student who wants to be able to read or assimilate the best work done in Romance to date has to begin by mastering the basics of the theory of language underlying much of the best recent work on Romance and other languages.

If, in addition, he takes a creative approach to the enterprise and aspires to be able to make contributions of his own, he will have to be trained in the art of constructing good linguistic arguments. But trying to learn this from the most accomplished masterpieces might be like trying to learn how to play the guitar by listening to many records by Andrés Segovia. The student needs to begin at the beginning, with the most clearly spelled out work. If he can only resort to printed sources, he will necessarily have to go outside Romance scholarship for the most general introductions.

For example, a good introduction to the art of argumentation in syntax is the one by Akmajian and Heny for English, published a few months ago by the MIT Press. A good place to begin the study of an important area of Romance syntax is the 1972 doctoral dissertation on Portuguese complementation by Antonio Carlos Quicoli, an outstanding young Romanist from Brazil. Quicoli's dissertation is in any case a must for every Romance scholar, and not only for those specializing in Portuguese. This is not to say that it is free from shortcomings. I understand that Quicoli himself has already improved considerably the treatment of some of the questions he dealt with in 1972.

After reading Quicoli's dissertation it will be much easier to understand the extended and careful monograph on French syntax by Richard Kayne published by MIT a few days ago. The student who works through this book will be able to notice, for example, that the name of Jean-Claude Milner, one of the youngest and most competent French linguists, appears in it side by side with the name of Philippe Martinon, born almost a century earlier, and that Kayne explicitly recognizes his debt to Martinon, which he says he consulted extensively, while some of the better known authorities of Romance scholarship are not to be found in Kayne's bibliography (on the other hand, the name of Philippe Martinon is not even mentioned in *An Introduction to Romance Linguistics, its schools and scholars* by Jordan, Orr and Possner, published in 1970 by the University of California Press, to mention just the one closest to home).

If the student prefers to begin with the study of the other type of complementation (taking the term complementation in a wider sense), he might turn to Professor Susan Plann's UCLA dissertation on relatives in Spanish or to Milner's work and to Vergnaud's MIT dissertation on French relatives. Emonds' recent article on French clitics can be better understood within the framework he develops in his forthcoming book (which, incidentally, should be required reading for every linguist), and so can Strozer's dissertation on Spanish clitics. This is only a brief sample, but in my view it includes some of the very best work readily available on Romance syntax, and, if I am not mistaken, it represents considerable progress and brings about a change of perspective on the subject.

I would like to close with a few words about the literature side of Romance scholarship. Since I have already taxed your patience enough, I will touch only briefly on a single topic. It is a central topic in a major work by a Romance scholar. The book I have in mind is the famous *Mimesis*, written by Erich Auerbach, whose name is barely mentioned in the Jordan-Orr-Possner survey, thirty years ago in Istanbul. In my opinion the significance of this book has not been fully appreciated. This is perhaps due in part to the fact that its sub-title, "Represented reality in Western literature", appears in the English translation, inexplicably, as "The representation of reality in Western literature".

As Käte Hamburger points out in her book *Die Logik der Dichtung*, published in 1957 (the very year of Auerbach's death), he uses the term *mimesis* in its proper Aristotelian sense and, like Hamburger, and like Jespersen before both of them, he tries to relate the implications of the so-called "erlebte Rede" or "free indirect speech" (treated already with insight in Jespersen's book) to the Aristotelian notion. The point I want to make here is simply that, as Professor Ann Banfield has shown in an article published two years ago in *Foundations of Language*, the study of "free indirect speech" requires a considerable knowledge of grammatical theory. On the other hand, the grammatical elucidation of the intriguing literary phenomenon known as "free indirect style" throws considerable light on basic questions of literary theory, in particular on the notion of literary genre, as Professor Yuki Kuroda has argued, along Aristotelian lines, in a still unpublished paper. This is just one example of the relevance of linguistics to the study of literature, but its importance cannot be easily overestimated. (Another interesting recent contribution is Mitsou Ronat's discussion of the implications of the dispute between the school of La Pléiade and the school of Lyon.)

Since there is no time for a fuller development of the topic and I will be delivering a paper on Vargas Llosa touching on it in the near future, I will say no more about it now. But I would like to stress here that, again as in the case of the guitar and Segovia, it will be much easier for the average student to

come to do creative work as a literary scholar after he learns enough linguistics to tackle this and other literary topics than after he reads a good number of exceptional works by highly gifted literary scholars who rely heavily on their own ingenuity and tremendous erudition. For example, to do something in the order of Francisco Rico's monumental study on Petrarch, one has to be born a Francisco Rico, while to be able to do original work on something which can be submitted to systematic and really meaningful exploration following explicit principles is usually possible, and often rewarding, after acquiring some basic knowledge that every student can eventually master.

In closing, I would like to mention that Professor Yakov Malkiel pointed out some time ago that for many years "practitioners of Romance linguistics in this country had found it hard to walk with heads erect" because of the "acute awareness" and the "frequent . . . painful reminders of the relative weakness of their discipline in comparison to its rivals, of far more obvious appeal" (Possner, 410n). It would seem that an unfailing antidote against a recurrence of such a condition, which correlates with the abnormal condition discussed by Professor Possner, would be to show a readiness to take Romance scholarship back into the mainstream of intellectual developments, rather than persisting in keeping it aside as a "highly atypical subdiscipline", to use an expression often quoted with approval. There is little doubt that all of us, and in particular the students who have their whole professional life ahead of them, have much to gain from it.

Carlos-Peregrín Otero
University of California, Los Angeles

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