The Reception of Generativism in Romance Linguistics

Diego Pescarini

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Diego Pescarini

CNRS, Université Côte d'Azur, BCL

dpescarini@univ-cotedazur.fr

1 Introduction

This article deals with the impact of generative ideas and analyses on the study of Romance languages. In particular, it aims to highlight some connections (or lack thereof) between generative and Romance linguistics, although a thorough reconstruction of the relationship between the two remains an open problem due the absence of explicit documentation on the topic.

What follows focuses mostly on syntax, which is the level of analysis in which generative ideas resulted in discontinuities and where generative and non-generative analyses still differ greatly. In this respect, it is also worth bearing in mind that the reception of generative ideas in the various subfields of the discipline has been uneven. Impressionistically, generative phonology and morphology were much less revolutionary than syntax: both structuralist and generative phonology deal with inventories of sounds/forms, assume that phones are instantiations of abstract phonemes, and postulate matrixes of features. Conversely, no consensus holds between generativists and non-generativists concerning the nature of syntactic objects or the format of syntactic representations. In this respect, Chomsky's uncompromising ideas required a complete change of paradigm that many scholars could not accept. Moreover, consider that (synchronic) syntax had been largely neglected by Romanists before the first generation of generativists began to tackle the field that, at that time, was almost virgin.

In this contribution I focus mainly on the *pioneering phase* (ranging from the late 60s to the early 80s), when self-taught generativists began to approach Romance, get in contact with colleagues in the few centres of diffusion of the theory, and disseminate (or defend) generative ideas in a non-generative (or anti-generative) word. From the point of view of the reception of generative ideas, the pioneering phase was characterised by frank exchanges between generativists dealing with Romance and Romanists *stricto sensu*. Both communities often had the same background, attended the same conferences, published in the same journals, etc.

In the early 80s the exchanges between the growing generative community and the community of Romanists began to decrease and, save for few scholars with research interests in both subfields, the contacts between the two groups became more episodic. Scholars with a generative background established programmes and courses in generative grammar and set up a dedicated network of communication and publication venues dedicated to the dissemination of generative analyses. I will refer to this latter period as the *consolidation phase*.

The article is organised as follows: §2 deals with the dissemination of generative works and ideas among Romance (and Romance-speaking) linguists; §3 focuses on some topics and domains of generative research in the field of Romance linguistics; §4 deals with the reception of generativism by non-generativist linguists.

2. Generative studies on Romance: some coordinates

2.1 Centres of diffusion

Generative grammar has been developed mainly in the U.S., in particular at the linguistics department of MIT. The first generation of scholars that approached the study of the Romance languages from a generativist perspective either studied or visited MIT in the late 60s and early 70s.The first MIT dissertation entirely devoted to Romance was Richard Kayne's thesis on French syntax (1969; published in 1975; translated into French in 1977). Kayne's monograph inaugurated a tradition of studies that was going to flourish in the following years thanks to the contribution of several Romance-speaking scholars that obtained their doctorate at MIT: Jean-Roger Vergnaud (1974), Joan Mascaro (1976), Alberto Mario Rivas (1977), Osvaldo A. Jaeggli (1980), Luigi Burzio (1981), Maria-Luisa Zubizarreta (1982), Maria Rita Manzini (1983), Dominique Sportiche (1983).

The above list of dissertations offers a few glimpses on the research agenda of generative grammarians – mostly syntacticians – working at MIT on Romance data: clitics, relative clauses, pro-drop, argument structure, restructuring, control, etc. (see §3). Besides students, the MIT department regularly attracted visiting researchers, who often spent a period in the US after receiving a first training in Europe. The two centres of diffusion of generative grammar in Europe were the Netherlands and Paris (more precisely, the University of Paris 8 located in Vincennes). Paris/Vincennes was the institution where many Romance-speaking early

researchers received their first training in generative grammar from Richard Kayne, Nicolas Ruwet (visiting scholar at MIT, 1967-68), and Jean-Roger Vergnaud.

Pica and Rooryck 1994 offers a list of the students that attended courses at Vincennes or spent there visiting periods (just to mention a few that were giving or going to give influential contributions to the field of Romance linguistics: Obenauer, Ronat, Fradin, Aoun, Zubizaretta, Pica, Déprez, Taraldsen, Hirschbühler, Rizzi, Belletti, Longobardi, Manzini, Ambar). Since the mid 80s the alumni of Vincennes spread across Europe and north America, widening the network of generativist scholars working on Romance and establishing new centres of diffusion of the theory such as Geneva and Barcelona.

2.2 Translations of Chomsky's works and publication of introductory books

Chomsky's books began to be translated into Romance languages in the late 60s. The circulation of Chomsky's works in Romance-speaking countries took place later than in the Germanic and Slavic world (Everaert & Reuland 2011); moreover, the spreading of Chomsky's theory was faster among psychologists, mathematicians, and early computer scientists than among (Romance) linguists (Graffi 1990: 150; Nicolae 2018).

According to many sources, the translation and circulation of Chomsky's works was one of the many consequences of the 1968 protest movement. In linguistics, undergraduates and early-stage researchers, who were eager for new theories and approaches, began to reject the historical/philological vision of the discipline defended by the established faculty (Pica & Rooryck 1994; Everaert & Reuland 2011). The systematic translation of Chomsky's essays began in this scenario: *Aspects of the theory of syntax* (Chomsky 1965), for instance, was translated into Romanian in 1969, into Italian and Spanish in 1970, into French in 1971.

Translations gathered attention around Chomsky's ideas, which in the early 70s began to be systematically discussed by Romance-speaking linguists (cf. Rosetti 1971a/b), including Romanists (see §3). Chomsky's notoriety, which was increased by events such as the debate with Piaget at the Royaumont Abbey (1975), fed the debate, which at that time revolved about highly theoretical aspects, rather than about the technical implementation of generative analyses (more on this below). As previously mentioned, this is particularly true for Chomsky's ideas about syntax, acquisition, and cognition. In fact, Chomsky & Halle 1968, the manifesto of generative (morpho)phonology, did not enjoy resonance among the wide audience and has not been translated into many Romance languages.

After the pioneering period, Chomsky's ideas began to circulate only in the original English version or through notes taken by other scholars – in English – such as Pollock's transcripts of Chomsky's lectures held in 1974 at the LSA Institute and in 1979 at the *Scuola Normale Superiore* in Pisa (the latter transcripts were made in collaboration with H.-G. Obenauer and were eventually published as Chomsky 1981). These documents, in English, fostered the diffusion of the theory among specialists, but it is clear that, given their nature, their style, and their language, they were not intended for an audience of scholars with no generative background. The *Pisa lectures* (Chomsky 1981) can be considered a turning point in the diffusion of generative ideas: Chomsky's ideas were no longer translated or discussed with outsiders since the growing community of generativists had finally reached a sufficient critical mass to form its own audience of insiders.

In fact, since the early 80s, the translation of Chomsky's works slowed down in many Romance-speaking countries.[1] Translations were usually done of Chomsky's most accessible books such as *Language and Problems of Knowledge* (1988; translated into Italian by Andrea Moro), whereas the much more technical *Barriers* (Chomsky 1986) has never been translated.

The use of English as lingua franca was a practical choice: most theorists were English native-speakers, the theory had been developed in the US, scholars working on various linguistic families were collaborating to develop the generative theory, etc. However, the choice of English as their language of scientific communication could appear also an ideological choice in contrast with the praxis of Romanists, who has always preferred the Romance languages (or German). From a sociology of science standpoint, this linguistic divide increased the isolation of generative linguists working on Romance from the community of Romance linguists, who has kept writing and discussing in the various Romance languages.

English is also the language of most generative-oriented monographic works on Romance, whereas introductory works and textbooks have been written and published in Romance languages since the late 60s. In France, Ruwet wrote the first introduction to generative grammar in a Romance language, published in 1967. The tenets of generative

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[1] In Romania the publication of Chomsky's works practically stopped for political reasons. To limit the influence of foreign countries and organisations, Ceauşescu inaugurated autarchic policies that increased the country's isolation. As Nicolae 2018 puts it, the diffusion of generative grammar in Romanian in the 70s took place in the framework of the *Romanian-English Contrastive Analysis Project*. The project was funded by the American *Center for Applied Linguistics*, a think tank aiming to improve the teaching of English around the world. With the new policy of the authoritarian state, scientific exchanges, projects and international collaborations were suspended.

linguistics were later illustrated in Milner (1973) and thoroughly discussed in Ronat's interview with Chomsky (Chomsky 1977). In Italy as well the diffusion of Chomsky's theories was supported by manuals and introductory books such as Saltarelli 1970; Bonomi and Usberti 1971; Parisi and Antinucci 1973, Lo Piparo 1974.

Miscellaneous volumes illustrating the state-of-the-art of generative studies began to be published since the late 70s, e.g. Sánchez de Zavala 1976, Graffi & Rizzi 1979, Ronat & Couquaux 1986. These works were not intended to target Romanists, but the publication of introductory books and collections of essays on generative grammar in the Romance languages allowed the diffusion of Chomsky's ideas among the new generations of students and scholars in the Romance-speaking world.

2.3 Conferences, journals, and monographs on single languages

During the *pioneering phase*, generative works were normally published in theoretically-neuter journals, including those focusing on Romance linguistics, philology, and literature such as *Revue roumaine de linguistique* (Pană, 1966; Golopenția Eretescu 1978), *Els Marges: Revista de Llengua i Literatura* (cf. Farreras 1975, 1977a/b), *Lingua e Stile* (Graffi 1977; Cinque 1979; Rizzi 1980), *Studi mediolatini e volgari* (Rizzi 1974), *Cahiers de linguistique theorique et appliquée* (Golopenția Eretescu 1978), Langages (which hosted a special issue ed. by A. Rouveret, 1980), *Langue Française* (Ruwet 1970), etc.

In the late 70s several national *fora* were established for the discussion of general aspects of generative grammar. Some of them, such as the Italian *Incontro di Grammatica Generativa* (since 1973), were originally conceived as annual national meetings of scholars from the same nation who, especially at that time, worked mostly on their native languages or dialects. Two international periodical meetings on Romance were established as well: one in the US (the *Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages*, LSRL, since the early 70s) and *Going Romance* in Europe (since 1986), which is organised by a steering committee of Dutch linguists. The yearly proceedings of LSRL and Going Romance – which are now published by John Benjamins – are reference works in the field. As for journals, generative works on Romance have been systematically published in major general linguistics journals, but the specific venue of publication for works on Romance, Latin and diachronic linguistics is *Probus* (established in 1989).

As for monographic works on Romance, it is worth distinguishing theory-oriented from theory-informed monographs. The former are works on the Romance languages that do not provide extensive descriptions of languages, but rather very fine-grained analyses of selected topics such as in Kayne 1975, Rizzi 1982, Burzio 1986. These books aim to target the narrow readership of generativists and discuss theoretical issues in the light of data from Romance. With these publications, generative scholars did little or nothing to disseminate their findings beyond the narrow audience of specialists and in fact the impact of these seminal works on the wider field of Romance linguistics remains quite scarce.

Other authors, by contrast, provided theory-informed grammatical descriptions that, although containing generative-style analysis, are more accessible from the audience of non-specialists: see, among others Costabile 1967, Vasiliu and Golopenția-Eretescu 1969, Hadlich 1971, Bonet & Solà 1986. In this respect, the greatest editorial projects has been Lorenzo Renzi's *Grande Grammatica Italiana di Consultazione* (Renzi 1988). The Grande Grammatica is a theory-informed work resulting from the collaboration of generativist and non-generativist linguists. It contains no generative formalism, but the traditional apparatus of previous descriptive grammars is systematised and scientifically tested through grammaticality judgements. The *Grande Grammatica* does not build on previous descriptions, nor is it based on the scrutiny of a closed corpus; instead, each grammatical phenomenon is explored anew and empirical generalisations are meticulously tested against speakers' intuitions. The planning and first exchanges for the Grande Grammatica began in the mid 70s (Renzi & Salvi 2015) and the first of the three volumes appeared in 1988. Mitsou Ronat at the beginning of the 80s launched a similar project in France, which eventually aborted (Pica & Rooryck 1994). To the best of my knowledge, Renzi's Grande Grammatica remains the sole descriptive grammar resting upon a generativist philosophy that can be read by non-specialist and by a general audience.

3. Topics

Generative grammar yielded advancements in the description (if not in the explanation) of several grammatical phenomena that had not studied systematically yet. The following is an incomplete list of topics that have been addressed in the generative framework since the early 70s: word order phenomena (verb/subject inversion, fronting, dislocation, etc.); the typology, semantics and syntax of interrogative and exclamative clauses; the classification and structure

of copular and existential sentences; the interplay between complementation, mood and clause typing; the structure of relative clauses; the properties of subjects (e.g. differences between preverbal and postverbal subjects, pro-drop, control, syntax and morphology of subject clitics); impersonal, middle, and reflexive constructions; auxiliary selection and related phenomena (e.g. participle agreement, *ne* cliticisation, etc.); causatives constructions and restructuring predicates; the syntax of object clitics (climbing, doubling, etc.); the syntax of the noun phrase (e.g. the compatibility and order of nominal modifiers, patterns of nominal agreement, the position and interpretation of adjectival classes, etc.); quantification; adverbs and the encoding of TAM features; negation and negative words.

By scrutinizing the literature on these topics, it seems that some phenomena have been accounted for mainly or exclusively by generative grammarians. In some cases, the generative theory led to discover or allowed to shed light on certain aspects of syntactic structures that had remained unnoticed such as the systematic differences in the placement of finite and non-finite verbal forms with respect to certain adverbs, a phenomenon that has been studied systematically since Pollock's 1989 seminal work. However, it seems to me that the empirical advancements in these domains have been scarcely received by Romanists.

Besides linguistic description and analysis of major Romance languages such as Italian, Spanish, French, Romanian, etc., the generative theory inspired a significant amount of research on dialectal and historical varieties (§§3.1-2) and, more recently, it triggered interest in experimental methods.

3.1 Dialects

Since the early 80s generative grammar has been adopted to model data from Romance dialects and, in turn, data from Romance vernaculars have been used to challenge, support, or refine generative theorizing. For instance, Brandi and Cordin's 1981 article on subject clitics in Italo-Romance contributed to broaden the ongoing debate on the nature of null subject languages and on the formalisation of the pro-drop parameter.

The application of generativism to the study of microvariation, i.e. the comparison of minimally-different and genealogically-related linguistic varieties, triggered new empirical surveys. The major sources of data on dialects are linguistic atlases and grammatical descriptions, most of which focus mainly on lexical, phonetic, and morphological aspects. The reception of generativism among dialectologists opened the door to a new series of projects,

which benefited from pioneering information management systems (i.e. databases) and adopted an open-access philosophy *ante litteram*.

The marriage between theory-oriented research and dialectology proved to be particularly fruitful also because the elicitation of grammaticality judgements was compatible with the methodology of dialectology, i.e. questionnaire-based interviews to MORM speakers ('nonmobile, older, rural males'). By adopting the same technique, generative grammarians are able to test the grammaticality of a given structure by asking the subjects to translate short sentences from the roofing language (e.g. Italian or Portuguese) to dialect.

Sentences obtained through face-to-face interviews are eventually transcribed and stored in databases, from which they can be retrieved through a dedicated tagging system. The first generative-oriented repository of dialect data was the Syntactic Atlas of Northern Italy (ASIS then ASIt, Syntactic Atlas of Italy), followed by similar enterprises in Portugal (the Cordial-Sin project: Syntactically Annotated Corpus of Portuguese Dialects), the morphosyntactic module of Thesoc (on Occitan Dialects; still not available on line), and the project ASinEs (still in progress), which focuses on syntactic variation in Spanish dialects.

It is hard to assess whether the data collected by the above theory-informed projects had any impact on the field and to what extent theory-neutral Romanists have benefited from these collections of data. In fact, the data gathered in the above projects were often meant to answer specific theoretical questions and, without a thorough knowledge of the desiderata behind the formulation of questionnaires, syntactic data could not catch the attention of the wider community of Romanists.

3.2 Diachronic syntax

Since the late 60s American linguists recognised the potential of generative/transformational grammar for the analysis of linguistic (namely, syntactic) change. We will see in §4.1 that works such as King 1969 triggered the debate on generativism among Romance linguists, most of whom had a historical background. However, the first attempts to tackle diachronic change from a generative perspective took place some ten years later, in the wake of the influential work of David Lightfoot (1979) and within the innovative framework of the Principles and Parameters model (Chomsky 1981).

The study of medieval Romance relied on a solid tradition of studies by philologists and linguists established since the 19th century. At the beginning, there was no large-scale

collaboration between philologists and generative linguists, but the latter built upon edited texts in order to formalise the observations of previous generations of Romanists, reformulate pre-theoretic descriptions, and reconsider certain phenomena in the light of generative theorizing. Having philologically sound editions and a sufficiently wide corpus, generative grammarians could apply the generative method to dead languages, thus concluding that unattested structures were also ungrammatical. This approach was adopted to account for several peculiarities of early Romance, above all for the analysis of word order in the medieval clause. Medieval Romance looks more liberal than most modern languages, although certain orders are (virtually) unattested. This led Benincà 1983 to hypothesise that medieval Romance languages differ from most modern languages in allowing the displacement of multiple constituents to the left periphery of the clause, which is constrained by a syntactic requirement that recalls – at a certain level of abstraction – the one yielding the verb-second order of present-day German. The V2 nature of early Romance became a highly debated topic in the field and a major source of debate inside and outside the community of generativists.

Advancements in the syntactic analysis of early Romance have been lately organised in reference works such as the *Grammatica dell'Italiano antico* (Salvi & Renzi 2010), which offers a thorough description of the linguistic competence of an ideal speaker/writer living in Florence in the first half of the 14th century. The Grammatica dell'Italiano antico – which features chapters written by generative syntacticians – avoids generative technicalities, but capitalises on generalisations and ideas that have been widely discussed in the rich tradition of generative studies on medieval Romance.

4 The view from Romance

The theory of generative grammar rests upon few epistemological assumptions and some methodological guidelines. Whereas these aspects have not changed significantly after the 70s, the technical modelling of the data has been subject to debate and successive reformulations. In fact, generative grammar is more multifaceted than often thought and, in order to assess to what extent generativism spread within the field of Romance linguistics, it is necessary to consider the various components of the theory separately.

The section is organised in three subsections: §4.1 deals with the reception of the epistemological assumptions overarching generative approaches; §4.2 focuses on some

methodological aspects of the theory; §4.3 overviews some models of generative grammar that have been adopted for the analysis of Romance languages.

4.1 Assumptions

The theory of generative grammar aims to model the *linguistic competence*, i.e. the implicit knowledge that allows every human being to interpret and build complex linguistic structures from a finite number of symbols and sounds. Generative grammar is not a comprehensive theory of language as many aspects of language ultimately fall outside this relatively narrow definition. In particular, phenomena that are linked to cultural or social factors are programmatically discarded from the theory, which focuses instead on *core* grammatical phenomena (e.g. syntactic constituency, syllabic structure, etc.). From a cognitive standpoint, such phenomena are not shaped by communicative purposes and do not serve as instruments of social interaction, but rather follow from requirements that are internal to the grammatical system. Hence, the first assumption of the generative theory is that, to deal with structural phenomena, one needs to postulate an autonomous grammatical component organised *iuxta propria principia*. By the same token, one must refuse teleological or functional explanations that analyse grammatical structures as a by-product of more general communicative needs.

The idea of an autonomous and specific endowment of the linguistic competence was originally combined with insights about language acquisition, which led Chomsky to the hypothesis that part of our linguistic competence is *universal* and *innate*. The extent to what our linguistic competence is innate is subject to ongoing debate even among generative grammarians and, on this topic, generative theorising has changed significantly over time. It is worth noting that, for scholars working on specific linguistic families/groups, the claim that our linguistic competence is *universal* or even *innate* may remain in the background. Conversely, the hypothesis that linguistic competence is *implicit* and *autonomous* has more direct consequences on everyday research praxis because it entails a change of perspective from a social/cultural dimension to an internal/cognitive one.

The idea that grammatical structures result from an implicit knowledge captured the attention of Romanists since the early 70s. One of the first official reactions from the community of Romanists regarded the possible role of generative grammar in the analysis of linguistic change. During the 14th International Conference of Romance Linguistics and Philology (CILFR) held in Napoli (April 1974; proceedings ed. by Varvaro 1978) a roundtable was organised to discuss the possible interaction between transformational grammar and

historical grammar. The roundtable featured four talks by Luigi Heilmann (*Grammatica generativa trasformazionale e grammatica storica*), Noel L. Corbett (*De la philologie à la grammaire transformationnelle, en passant par le structuralisme: Perspectives sur le changement phonétique*), Maria Manoliu-Manea (*Grammaire transformationnelle et linguistique romane: Le changement syntaxique*), and Eugenio Coseriu (*Grammaire transformationnelle et grammaire historique*). Out of the four discussants, only Maria Manoliu-Manea had already implemented generative ideas in her works such as the *Gramatica comparată a limbilor romanice* (1971) or in the forthcoming *Tipologie şi istorie. Elemente de sintaxă comparată romanică* (1977). In general, however, methodological and technical aspects of the theory, its explanatory power, and its empirical adequacy with respect to Romance were not touched upon. The roundtable focused on the epistemological aspects of the theory and the debate revolved mainly around highly theoretical issues and on how to integrate generative grammar in the scenario of ongoing linguistic theorizing.

In this respect, one crucial aspect in the reception of generativism was the perceived relationship between Chomsky's ideas and (post) *structuralism* on the one hand and historical linguistics on the other. As Graffi 1990: 148ff puts it, in Italy – but the same holds true for other Romance-speaking countries but France – the scene of linguistics in the postwar period was dominated by historical-comparative linguistics and most scholars had a scarce attitude for theoretical studies. This hindered the diffusion of structuralism until the end of the 60s, when most cornerstones 20th century linguistics such as Saussure's *Cours*, Sapir's *Language,* Hjelmslev's *Prolegomena* were translated into Italian and published in the same years as Chomsky's works. From the point of view of scholars with a historical background, all these works – including Chomsky's – were instantiations of the same *ahistorical* approach, rather than competing approaches. This is confirmed by Giulio Lepschy's 1966 and Maria Manoliu-Manea's 1973 books on structural linguistics (written in Italian and Romanian, respectively), both of which feature a chapter on transformational grammar as it was a branch of American structuralism. It is commonly held that the French academic environment, where structuralism had been the dominant paradigm for decades, was less permeable to generativism than others. However, as noticed by Pica & Rooryck 1994, Paris was the earliest centre of diffusion of generative ideas among Romance-speaking scholars in the late 60s and, in the following decades, the hostility from outside was only one of the causes that hindered the development of a generative tradition in France. In fact, tensions among generative grammarians were quite frequent in the late 60s and early 70s, when the consensus on the theoretical principles of the theory was far from unanimous. The embryonic community of European generativists, in

particular the French one, divided over theoretical and philosophical issues related to whether Chomsky's vision was compatible with other philosophical scenarios such as psychanalysis (Milner 1978). Elsewhere, the notorious clash between Chomsky's orthodoxy and the supporters of generative semantics caused further contrasts and irremediable splits in the newly born generative communities in Europe. This witnesses a lively debate around the theoretical foundations of generativism inside and outside the early generative community. Romanists of the past generations took part and fed the debate *from outside*, without really committing themselves with transformational analysis. At that time, generative grammar was in fact a possible approach to synchronic linguistics among many others, which began to circulate in the (late) 60s. In conclusion, the philosophical implications of Chomsky's ideas were the aspect of the theory that first triggered a debate among Romanists and caused the first (and irremediable) divisions among the growing communities of generativists that in the pioneering phase had begun to work on Romance data. After Chomsky's *Pisa lectures* (Chomsky 1981), much of the theoretical debate faded away and a community of Romance linguists consolidated around the tenets of the Principles and Parameters framework. A boundary between outsiders and insiders was eventually set.

4.2 Methodology

Given its theoretical desiderata, the main goal of generative grammar is to distinguish grammatical from ungrammatical *objects*. Grammaticality judgements are assumed to reflect a kind of knowledge that is tacitly shared by the members of a linguistic community. By relying on grammaticality judgements given by a sample of speakers, generative researchers usually abstract away from sociolinguistic or idiosyncratic variants, which may be symptomatic of cultural/social traits. However, whereas, as previously mentioned, generative grammarians programmatically exclude this kind of evidence from the perimeter of their analysis, for scholars with a philological and historical expertise, cultural/social traits remained crucial evidence for the reconstruction of the evolution of languages as cultural artefacts.

Moreover, scholars with a philological background, in particular those working on death languages, are used to work on closed corpora, whereas generative grammarians need to interact with native speakers to elicit grammatical judgements and eventually distinguish the structures that are (accidentally) unattested from those that are truly impossible. Grammatical judgements, however, require a complete change in the research habits as the structures to be judged are created by the researchers to verify the limits of our linguistic competence. To do so, linguistic

data must be manipulated artificially until they fall beyond the limits of grammaticality. This methodology is very different from the usual data collection techniques that linguists adopt in other frameworks. In fact, the above methodology is more similar to experimental techniques and, as such, they are subject to the usual biases of experimental research. Regarding the latter point, in the past decades grammaticality judgements were mainly obtained by self-observation, but an increasing number of scholars is exploring new techniques in order to elicit gradable judgements from wider samples of speakers and treat the results statistically.

In the early 70s, the idea of eliciting grammaticality judgement from speakers was nothing more than a promising methodological innovation. As previously mentioned, the idea of eliciting primary data from non-linguists was widely accepted in the field of Romance linguistics as dialectologists had travelled for decades across valleys and villages to elicit data from the everyday man. The real innovation regarded the *type* of task required in the interview: not only the recollection of a word/form, but a judgement on a complex structure regardless of a socially established norm. To my knowledge, the first scholar that highlighted the possible consequences of this innovation was the philologist Lorenzo Renzi, who gave a talk 'Sulla grammaticalità' at the Conference of the Society of Italian Linguistics (SLI, Rome, 1969). It is not surprising that, whereas linguists were mostly interested in the chomskian theoretical apparatus (see §2.1), philologists such as Lorenzo Renzi understood the potential of the methodological and heuristic aspects of the new theory.

Renzi's concrete approach, in particular, led to the ambitious project of the *Grande Grammatica Italiana di Consultazione* (Renzi 1988-1995), resulting from the collaboration between emerging linguists, most of whom with a generative background (see §2.3). A reference work such as the Grande Grammatica showed that a deductive approach to grammar can yield a fine and robust description and demonstrated that linguists can adopt a rigorous descriptive apparatus resulting from generative desiderata, while dispensing with the impenetrable technicism of generative analysis.

4.3 Formalism

The format of generative models has changed over time, both in syntax and phonology. Changes are motivated by either theory-internal or empirical considerations. The former relate to the general orientation of the theory: in the earlies stage of generativism (until the mid 80s), generative grammar aimed to provide an adequate and comprehensive representation of the

grammatical traits of any language, whereas with the Minimalist Program the attention turned towards the narrow set of invariable properties that characterise the human language.

Moreover, the theory evolved also to provide a principled analysis of an increasing number of linguistic phenomena, which ended up shaping generative ideas. Since Kayne's seminal dissertation on French (1969; published as Kayne 1975), data from Romance contributed to the evolution of generative grammar from the transformational model of the 70s to the subsequent framework Principles and Parameters. However, besides the chomskian 'orthodoxy', various alternative proposals have been advanced across time, some of which have played a significant role in the field of Romance linguistics.

As previously mentioned, several Romance-speaking scholars of the first generation approached generative grammar in the 60s through the framework of generative semantics, but no trace of that vain is visible nowadays in the study of the Romance languages. The same holds for models such as *Lexical-functional grammar*, *Generalized phrase structure grammar*, *Head-driven phrase structure grammar*, etc. which have played a minor role in Romance syntax.

Conversely, in the 80s many studies regarding grammatical functions were couched within the framework of *Relational Grammar* (RG), which proved to be an intuitive and accessible model for the analysis of argument structure and was successfully adopted for the analysis of Romance languages (Rosen 1981).

As for phonology, the view proposed in Chomsky & Halle 1968 was lately improved by the autosegmental model and optimality theory. Alternative approaches have been explored as well, in particular within the framework of Government phonology and Element Theory, which has been developed by several European scholars – among others – in order to build a model of phonology that does not rely on rules, features, and ranked constraints (Kaye, Lowenstamm and Vergnaud 1985).

5. Conclusion

In this work I argued that the relationships between Romance linguistics and generativism began in the early 70s and can be divided into two phases: the *pioneering phase* (from the early 70s to the mid 80s), when generative ideas were circulated and debated among Romanists, and the *consolidation phase*, in which generative and 'traditional' Romanists formed two parallel communities. Generativists were theory-oriented, preferred top-down explanations, used Romance data in order to support very general principles, wrote mainly in English, whereas

Romanists kept following an empirical approach, preferring functional explanations and bottom-up generalisations on the basis of unstructured corpora.

Generative ideas in the field of Romance linguistics did not raise explicit reactions from the community of 'traditional' Romanists. Critical reviews of Chomsky's ideas have been published by general linguists or discussed by psychologists, philosophers, and mathematicians.

When generative grammarians began to focus on Romance (see §2), generative ideas were received with curiosity by theoreticians. However, a theory of the synchronic competence completely detached from the cultural heritage of a linguistic community (and entirely based on elicited data) was of no or little help to a community of scholars with a historical/philological background, working on change and variation.

Another factor that hindered the diffusion of generative ideas among Romanists is that syntax – the main field of generative analysis – had never taken centre stage in Romance linguistics. Romanists had focused mainly on systematic phonetic/phonological and morphological descriptions and analyses, whereas most syntactic phenomena, which had in fact been noticed, never enjoyed a comparable level of attention.

The lens of the generative theory allowed scholars to put in a new perspective known phenomena (e.g. *pro drop*), but generativism was rather impenetrable and, especially in its earliest stages, it appeared more monolithic, dogmatic, and impervious than nowadays. The highly technical style (and the auto-referential character) of most generativist studies hindered the diffusion of generative ideas and fed the prejudice against all aspects of generative grammar, including its methodology and its empirical findings.

Moreover, generative grammarian was initially viewed as an Anglo-centric model. It is true that until the early 60s the analysis of English was the core empirical domain of generativism, but this objection appeared already anachronistic in the early 80s, given the amount of works on other languages, including Romance (cf. §2). It is worth recalling, however, that most generative works on Romance were published only in English, against the traditional habits of the scientific community.

Lastly, another factor that hindered the circulation of generative ideas was the peculiar methodology of data collection, which in generative grammar is always theory-driven. Without a sufficient knowledge of the theory and derived research questions, most data collected for generative analyses appear irrelevant or even meaningless. Furthermore, since data are collected for the purpose of hypothesis-testing, generative grammarians often rely on grammatical judgements on syntactic linguistic structures that in every day interactions may

appear odd or marginal. These data are, for most linguists, a too slippery ground for scientific research.

All the objections listed so far have not been discussed thoroughly in sound reviews of generative works. In fact, the reception of generativism in Romance linguistics can be reconstructed more from lacunae than documents. The relatively scarce number of reactions to the publications of generative works is in part justified given the peculiar format of most generative works, i.e. theory-oriented articles, written in English, and testing very specific issues. This lack of interest, however, was reciprocal as very few generative linguists really committed themselves with the writings of non-generativists: frequently generative grammarian exploited the empirical findings of 'traditional' grammarians, without elaborating too much on the historical and extralinguistic context in which those data had been gathered. It was this mutual indifference (rather than an overt antipathy) that has led to the consolidation, since the early 80s, of conference, journals, and book series specifically targeted at generative grammarians working on Romance. In fact, two distinct scientific communities – one more theory-oriented than the other – have grown in parallel, working on similar phenomena from different perspectives, and presenting their work in separate and largely incommunicable venues.

Nowadays it seems that the collaboration between generativists and Romanists with a more traditional background are increasing. The sessions of phonology and syntax of the international conference of the *Société de Linguistique Romane* regularly hosts talks couched in the framework of generative grammar, whereas handbooks on Romance such as Ledgeway & Maiden 2016 feature contributions by generativists. It seems that the gap that characterised the period 80s-90s is gradually reducing.

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