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The Reception of Generativism in Romance Linguistics

Diego Pescarini

Summary: The reception of generativism in Romance linguistics has been uneven. In the field of morphophonology, scholars engaged in the discussion about the tenets of generative phonology as early as in the 1960s. Structuralist and generative phonologists spoke a mutually understandable metalanguage and worked on agreed-upon empirical facts. Generative syntacticians, by contrast, developed a far more intricate and technical metalanguage by exploring little-known phenomena or by turning apparently trivial facts into theoretically appealing issues. As a result, the reception of generativism in Romance syntax has been almost pathological: generative and 'traditional' Romance scholars have kept working on similar phenomena, but from irreconcilable perspectives. Findings and ideas have often been discussed in separate venues and largely incommunicable terms.

The reasons for such a mutual indifference (rather than an overt antipathy) are quite understandable. On the one hand, scholars with a historical/philological background, working on change and variation, had no or little interest in a model of synchronic competence detached from the cultural heritage of linguistic communities. Moreover, the highly technical style of generativist studies – mostly in English – hindered the diffusion of generative ideas beyond the circle of practitioners. On the other hand, generative grammarians have always had the tendency to exploit Romance data as a test bed for their theories, sometimes ignoring or downplaying the contribution of previous descriptive studies. From a generative standpoint, Romance linguistics has always been instrumental in improving theoretical linguistics, not the other way around.

The relationship between the communities of Romance linguists and generativists has evolved over time. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the debate was vivid, as witnessed by conference proceedings and articles focusing on the most theoretical aspects of transformational grammar and generative (morpho)phonology, in particular with respect to the analysis of linguistic change and reconstruction. With some remarkable exceptions, however, generative ideas and methods were not readily implemented and, since the early 1980s, the history of the reception of generativism in Romance linguistics can be reconstructed more from lacunae than documents.

In this scenario, collaborative projects featuring generative and non-generative linguists stand out, because not only are they rare, but they also yield exceptional results such as the *Grande Grammatica Italiana di Consultazione* or the *Gramática descriptiva de la lengua Española*, which are recognized reference works for both communities.

Keywords: Generative Grammar, Syntax, Morphology, Phonology, Romance, Dialects, History of Linguistics

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 linguistics and non-generative Romance linguistics, although a thorough reconstruction of the relationship between the two remains an open problem due to 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 greatly differ. The impact of generative phonology and morphology was undeniably remarkable, as witnessed by the number of pioneering monographic works such as Schane (1968) on French; Saltarelli (1968, 1970a) on Italian (and Italo-Romance); Mascaró (1976) on Catalan; Foley (1965), Harris (1967), Cressey (1978) on Spanish. Nonetheless, it seems to me that generative syntax had a more decisive (and disruptive) impact on Romance linguistics than generative morphophonology. In the field of morphophonology, non-generativist scholars immediately engaged in the discussion, which touched various tenets of generative phonology such as the (negated) autonomy of the phonemic level (Halle, 1959), the abstractness controversy (Kiparsky, 1968), the technical apparatus of Chomsky and Halle (1968). Contributions to the debate relied upon a theoretical and empirical common ground: structuralist and generative phonologists spoke a mutually understandable metalanguage – made of rules and features – and they mostly agreed on descriptive labels such as *liaison* (Schane, 1967) or *metaphony* (Calabrese, 1984). By contrast, syntacticians adopted a far less comprehensible metalanguage in which highly theoretical concepts (e.g. *c-command, subjacency, islands*) were mixed with traditional terms, which, however, were frequently redefined according to theory-internal principles (e.g. *anaphor*, *Case*). From an empirical standpoint, generative grammarians began to explore an almost virgin field of research, by discovering new phenomena or by turning apparently trivial facts into theoretically appealing issues. Topics such as binding, control, null subjects, raising, islands, etc. had been almost neglected in previous descriptive works and their relevance for the discipline has been questioned since then. Yet, no consensus has emerged 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 simply could not accept.

In this contribution I focus mainly on the *pioneering phase* (ranging from the late 1960s to the early 1980s), 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) world. 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 Romance scholars *stricto sensu*. Both communities often had the same background, attended the same conferences, published in the same journals, etc.

In the early 1980s the exchanges between the growing generative community and the community of Romance scholars 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 landmarks

2.1 Centres of diffusion

Generative grammar developed mainly in the U.S., in particular in the linguistics department of MIT. The first generation of scholars that approached the study of the Romance languages from a generativist perspective studied or visited MIT in the mid-1960s and early 1970s. The first MIT dissertations entirely devoted to Romance were Sanford Schane's *The phonological and morphological structure of French* (1965) and James Harris's *Spanish Phonology* (1967). The first dissertation on Romance syntax was Richard Kayne's thesis on French syntax (1969; published in 1975; translated into French in 1977). Romance data were examined in David Perlmutter's class lectures at MIT in the mid-1970s. Perlmutter's analysis of Italian was published in 1983, but his insights played a central role in Carol Rosen's and Luigi Burzio's dissertations (both defended in 1981), which were couched in the framework of Relational Grammar and Tranformational Grammar, respectively (the intricate history of the genesis and attribution of the Unaccusativity Hypothesis is reconstructed in Pullum, 1988).

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).

This list of dissertations offers a few glimpses into the research agenda of generative 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 U.S. 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 & Rooryck 1994 offer a list of the students who attended courses at Vincennes or spent their 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-1980s, 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 1960s. 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, p. 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 junior 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, and into French in 1971.

Translations gathered attention around Chomsky's ideas, which in the early 1970s began to be systematically discussed by Romance-speaking linguists (cf. Rosetti, 1971a/b), including Romance scholars (see §3). International events such as the debate between Chomsky and Piaget at the Royaumont Abbey (1975) fostered the diffusion of Chomsky's ideas about syntax, acquisition, and cognition. In comparison, Chomsky and Halle (1968), the manifesto of generative (morpho)phonology, did not enjoy a similar degree of resonance among a wide audience, although it generated a host of studies on Romance phonology (as mentioned in §1). To the best of my knowledge, there are no translations in any Romance language of Chomsky and Halle (1968).

After the pioneering period, Chomsky's ideas began to circulate only in the original English version or through notes taken by other scholars 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). An accreted version of these lectures formed the backbone of 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 metalanguage, 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 1980s, the translation of Chomsky's works slowed down in several Romance-speaking countries.[1] Translations were usually done of Chomsky's most accessible books: for instance, *Knowledge of Language* (1986) and *Language and Problems*

[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 Romania in the 1970s 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.

of Knowledge (1988) were translated into Italian[2], 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 developed in the US, English provided relevant examples that did not need glossing, etc. However, the choice of English as their language of scientific communication could appear also as an ideological choice in contrast with the praxis of Romance scholars, who had 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 kept writing and discussing in the various Romance languages.

Nevertheless, introductory works and textbooks have been written and published in Romance languages since the late 1960s. In France, Ruwet wrote the first introduction to generative grammar in a Romance language, published in 1967. In the same year, Ruwet and others translated works by Halle, Kiparsky, Keyser, Ruwet, McCawley, Schane, and Foley for a monographic issue of *Langage* entitled *La phonologie générative*.

The tenets of generative 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). Critical assessments of the theory were made by general linguists such as Lo Piparo (1974), Hagège (1976), but rarely from the standpoint of Romance linguistics *stricto sensu*.

Miscellaneous volumes illustrating the state-of-the-art of generative studies began to be published since the late 1970s, e.g. Sánchez de Zavala (1976), Graffi and Rizzi (1979), Ronat and Couquaux (1986). These works were not intended to target Romance scholars, 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] Translations were done or supervised by Giuseppe Longobardi and Massimo Piattelli Palmarini (*Knowledge of Language*, 1989) and by Andrea Moro and Caterina Donati (*Language and Problems of Knowledge*, 1998).

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. They include *Revue roumaine de linguistique* (Pană, 1966; Golopenția Eretescu, 1978), *Els Marges: Revista de Llengua i Literatura* (Farreras, 1975, 1977a/b), *Lingua e Stile* (Graffi, 1977; Cinque, 1979; Rizzi, 1980), *Studi mediolatini e volgari* (Rizzi, 1974), *Cahiers de linguistique théorique et appliquée* (Golopenția Eretescu, 1978), *Langages* (which, besides the aforementioned issue on generative phonology, hosted a special issue edited by Rouveret in 1980), *Langue Française* (Ruwet, 1970), etc.

In the late 1970s, several national *fora* discussed the general aspects of generative grammar. Some of them, such as the Italian *Incontro di Grammatica Generativa* (since 1975), 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 1970s) and *Going Romance* in Europe (since 1986), which was organised by a steering committee of Dutch linguists. The yearly proceedings of LSRL and *Going Romance* are reference works in the field. As for journals, generative works on Romance systematically appeared in major general linguistics journals, but the specific venue for 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 (e.g. 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 remained quite scarce.

Other authors, by contrast, provided theory-informed grammatical descriptions that, although containing generative-style analyses, are more accessible from the audience of non-specialists: see, among others Costabile (1967), Vasiliu and Golopenția-Eretescu (1969), Hadlich (1971), Bonet and Solà (1986). In this respect, huge editorial projects such as Renzi, Salvi, and Cardinaletti's (1988-1995) *Grande Grammatica Italiana di Consultazione* and

Bosque & Demonte's (1999) *Gramática descriptiva de la lengua española* stand out. The *Grande Grammatica* is a theory-informed work resulting from the collaboration of generativist and non-generativist linguists. It contains no generative formalism; rather, 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-1970s (Renzi & Salvi, 2015), and the first of the three volumes appeared in 1988. Mitsou Ronat at the beginning of the 1980s launched a similar project in France, which eventually aborted (Pica & Rooryck, 1994). To the best of my knowledge, Renzi's *Grande Grammatica* (and its spin-off: Salvi and Renzi's (2010) *Grammatica dell'italiano antico*) and Bosque and Demonte's (1999) *Gramática descriptiva de la lengua española* are the sole comprehensive descriptive grammars resting upon generativist ideas that can be considered largely accessible for non-specialists.

3. Topics and empirical domains

Generative grammar yielded advancements in the description (if not in the explanation) of several grammatical phenomena that had not been systematically studied so far. The following is an incomplete list of topics addressed in the generative framework since the early 1970s. It includes: 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)[3]; impersonal, middle, and reflexive constructions; auxiliary selection and related phenomena (e.g. participle agreement, *ne* cliticisation, etc.); causative 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.);

[3] An anonymous reviewer highlighted the role of D. Perlmutter in launching the discussion on these topics, since his dissertation (defended in 1968, published in 1971) and in his later courses held in the mid-1970s.

quantification; adverbs and the encoding of Tense/Aspect/Mood 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, generative theory led to discover or shed light on certain aspects of syntax that had gone 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 Romance scholars have only scarcely received the empirical advancements in these domains.

Besides linguistic descriptions and analyses of major Romance languages such as Italian, Spanish, French, Romanian, etc., the generative theory has inspired a significant amount of research on dialectal and historical varieties (§§3.1 and 3.2) and, more recently, has triggered interest in experimental methods. Conferences and journals host an increasing number of psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic contributions focusing on acquisition, pathology, processing, etc. I refrain from expanding further on this because, although experimental studies rely on Romance data and speakers, their objectives normally exceed the domain of Romance linguistics *stricto sensu*. It is worth noting, however, that experimental methods are gradually changing the methodology of traditional syntactic analysis, which, among generativists, is increasingly reliant on gradient judgments, inferential analysis, and probability sampling techniques (Sprouse, Schütze & Almeida, 2013; see also criticism by Gibson & Fedorenko, 2010, 2013).

3.1 Dialects

Generative morphophonologists relied on dialectal data as early as the 1960s (Vasiliu 1966 on Daco-Romanian; Saltarelli 1966, 1968 on Italo-Romance). Syntacticians, in contrast, turned their attention to dialects in the early 1980s, and used data from Romance vernaculars 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.

In turn, 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 dialectal data were linguistic atlases and grammatical descriptions, mainly focusing 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 NORM speakers: 'non-mobile, older, rural males'). By adopting the same technique, generative grammarians were able to test the grammaticality of a given structure by asking informants to translate short sentences from a roofing language to another dialect.

Face-to-face interview sentences were eventually transcribed and stored in databases, and further retrieved through dedicated tagging systems. The first generative-oriented repository for dialectal data was the *Syntactic Atlas of Northern Italy* (ASIS then ASIt, *Syntactic Atlas of Italy*). Similar enterprises then emerged in Portugal (the Cordial-Sin project: *Syntactically Annotated Corpus of Portuguese Dialects*), in France (the morphosyntactic module of Thesoc on Occitan Dialects; still not available on line), and in Spain (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 have had any impact on the field and to what extent theory-neutral Romance scholars have benefited from these collections. In fact, because the above projects were often devised to answer specific theoretical questions, they could not catch the attention of the wider community of Romance scholars who had no thorough knowledge of the desiderata behind the formulation of the questionnaires.

3.2 Diachronic syntax

Since the late 1960s, American linguists recognised the potential of generative/transformational grammar for the analysis of linguistic change. King (1969) and, a decade later, Lightfoot (1979) were seminal attempts to tackle diachronic change from a generative perspective, in phonology and syntax, respectively (see in §4.1).

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 Romance scholars,

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 ones. This approach accounted 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 recently 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 1970s, 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 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 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. Consequently, the first assumption of the generative theory is that one needs to postulate an autonomous grammatical component organised *iuxta propria principia* in order to deal with structural phenomena. Similarly, 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 debates 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 Romance scholars since the early 1970s. One of the first official reactions from the community of Romance scholars 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 *Tipologie și istorie. Elemente de sintaxă comparată romanică* (1977). 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. Conversely, methodological and technical aspects of the theory, its explanatory power, and its empirical adequacy with respect to Romance were not addressed.

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, p. 148-149) puts it, in Italy – but the same holds true for other Romance-speaking countries (but France) – the scene of linguistics in the post-war period was dominated by historical-comparative linguistics and most scholars had a scarce aptitude for theoretical studies. This hindered the diffusion of structuralism until the end of the 1960s.[4] 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 was confirmed in Giulio Lepschy's (1966) and Maria Manoliu-Manea's (1973) books on structural linguistics (written in Italian and Romanian, respectively), both of which featured a chapter on transformational grammar as if 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. However, as noticed in Pica & Rooryck (1994), Paris was the earliest centre of diffusion of generative ideas among Romance-speaking scholars in the late 1960s 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 1960s and early 1970s, 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, tended to divide over

[4] According to Graffi (1990), most cornerstones of 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.

theoretical issues related to whether Chomsky's vision was compatible with other philosophical scenarios such as psychanalysis (Milner, 1978). Elsewhere, the clash between Chomsky's orthodoxy and the supporters of generative semantics[5] 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. Romance scholars of the past generations took part and fed the debate *from outside*, without really committing themselves with transformational analyses.

In conclusion, the philosophical implications of Chomsky's ideas were the aspect of the theory that first triggered a debate among Romance scholars 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, generative grammar mainly aims 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. Whereas generative grammarians programmatically exclude this kind of evidence from the perimeter of their analysis, scholars with a philological and historical expertise consider cultural/social traits as crucial evidence for the reconstruction of the evolution of languages as cultural artefacts.

Moreover, the latter, in particular those working on dead languages, are used to work on closed corpora, whereas generative grammarians need to interact with native speakers to elicit grammaticality judgements and eventually distinguish the structures that are (accidentally) unattested from those that are truly impossible (but see §3.2). Grammatical judgements, however, require a complete change in the research habits because the researchers create

[5] In Chomsky's theory, syntactic computation is divorced from semantic interpretation. Conversely, proponents of generative semanticists argue that the deep structure of sentences already provides semantic representations (Katz & Postal 1964). For an overview of the debate, see. Newmeyer 1980: 81ff.

sentences in order to verify the limits of linguistic competence and manipulate the data 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; it actually resembles experimental techniques and, as such, is subject to the usual biases of experimental research. Observer's paradox and availability biases run the risk of undermining qualitative research, especially when grammaticality judgements stem from self-observations. In fact, as mentioned in §3, 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 1970s, the idea of eliciting grammaticality judgements from speakers was nothing more than a promising methodological innovation, although, as mentioned in §3.1, the idea of eliciting primary data from non-linguists had been customary in dialectology, whose practitioners were used to travel across valleys and villages to elicit everyday data. The real innovation regarded the *type* of tasks required in the interview: the traditional recollection of a word/form *and* a judgement on a complex structure regardless of a socially established norm. To my knowledge, the first scholar who highlighted the possible consequences of this innovation was the philologist Lorenzo Renzi, who gave a talk 'Sulla grammaticalità' [on grammaticality] at the Conference of the Society of Italian Linguistics (SLI, Rome, 1973). It is not surprising that, whereas general linguists were mostly interested in the Chomskian theoretical apparatus (see §2.1), philologists such as Renzi (and Alfredo Stussi) 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, Salvi & Cardinaletti, 1988-1995), resulting from the collaboration between emerging linguists, most of whom had 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 stem from either empirical considerations or, more frequently, the general

orientation of the theory. In the early stages of generativism (until the mid-1980s), generative grammar aimed to provide an adequate and comprehensive representation of the grammatical traits of any language. However, with the Principles & Parameters model and, increasingly, with the Minimalist Program, the attention turned towards the narrow set of invariable properties that characterise human language.

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 have contributed to the evolution of generative grammar from the transformational model of the 1970s to the subsequent Principles and Parameters framework. However, besides the Chomskian 'orthodoxy', various alternative proposals arose 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 1960s through the framework of generative semantics, but no trace of that vain is visible nowadays in the study of the Romance languages. Similar considerations hold for models such as *Lexical-functional grammar*, *Generalized phrase structure grammar*, *Head-driven phrase structure grammar*, etc., which have played and still play a minor role in Romance syntax.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, many studies regarding grammatical functions emerged 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. We have already mentioned in §2 Perlmutter's leading role in fostering research on Romance, by exploring phenomena that were going to take centre stage in shaping RG (see Rosen's 1981 seminal dissertation, Postal 1977, 1981).

As for phonology, the view proposed in Chomsky and Halle (1968) was improved in the autosegmental model and optimality theory lately. Alternative approaches have been explored as well, in particular within the framework of Government phonology and Element Theory, 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

The relationships between Romance linguistics and generativism began in the mid-1960s for phonology and in the early 1970s for syntax. The reception of generative phonology was critical, but the debate around the tenets of the theory was generally in line with standard scientific practices in humanities. By contrast, the reception of transformational syntax (and its successive developments) was almost pathologic as it led to the creation of two autonomous scientific sub-communities. Generative ideas in the field of Romance syntax did not raise explicit reactions from the community of 'traditional' Romance scholars.

The reception of generative ideas (or lack thereof) in the field of syntax can be divided into two phases: the *pioneering phase* (from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s), when generative ideas were circulated and debated among Romance scholars, and the *consolidation phase*, when generative scholars established their own networks. In the former phase (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. Generativists were theory-oriented, preferred top-down explanations, used Romance data in order to support very general principles, and wrote mainly in English, whereas Romance scholars kept following an empirical approach, preferring functional explanations and bottom-up generalisations

Another factor hindering the dissemination of generative ideas among Romance scholars is that syntax – the main field of the generative analysis – had never taken centre stage in Romance linguistics. Romance scholars had focused on phonetics/phonology, morphology and the lexicon, and still tend to leave most syntactic phenomena aside.

The lens of generative theory allowed scholars to examine known and apparently trivial phenomena (e.g. *pro drop*) in a new perspective, but generativism was rather impenetrable and, especially in its earliest stages, appeared more monolithic and dogmatic 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 grammar initially appeared as an Anglo-centric model. It is true that English examples frequently illustrated the theory until the early 1960s. Nevertheless, as Newmeyer (1980, p. 40) points out, the bulk of generative theory was developed by scholars (Halle, Kiparsky, Hale, etc.) with expertise in various linguistic families and, in fact, 17 out of 28 dissertations written in linguistics at MIT in the 1960s were about languages other than

English, including several Romance ones (cf. §2). It is worth recalling, however, that most generative works on Romance are in English only, against the traditional habits of the community of Romance scholars.

Another factor hindering the circulation of generative ideas is the particular methodology in data collection, which is always theory-driven in generative grammar. Without sufficient knowledge of the theory, most data collected for the purpose of generative analysis appear irrelevant or even meaningless. Furthermore, since data are collected with the intent of hypothesis-testing, generative grammarians often rely on grammatical judgements of syntactic structures that may appear odd or marginal in every day interactions. For most linguists, these data then seem too artificial for scientific research.

Lastly, the relatively scarce number of reactions to the publications of generative works is in part justified given the particular format of most of them. Indeed, they are theory-oriented articles that test very specific issues and are written in English. This lack of interest, however, has been reciprocal, and very few generative linguists have shown real curiosity in the writings of non-generativists. At best, the generative grammarians exploited the empirical findings of the 'traditional' grammarians, without elaborating on the historical and extra-linguistic contexts of the data gatherings or, as an anonymous reviewer puts it, "they ignored them outright, even if the empirical results were obviously relevant".

This mutual indifference (rather than an overt antipathy) led to the creation of two distinct scientific communities. Since then, the reception of generativism in Romance linguistics can be reconstructed more from lacunae than documents, and in the early 1980s, generativists established their own *fora*, including conference, journals and book series specifically targeted for generative grammarians working on Romance.

The division between the two communities has deepened generation after generation, but it seems to me that the drift is slowing down. The success of Renzi's and Bosque's grammars, the wide circulation – even among students – of handbooks such as Ledgeway and Maiden (2016) (with contributions by generativists and Romance scholars with a more traditional background), an increasing number of generative grammarians attending the international conferences of the *Société de Linguistique Romane* may be faint signs of a welcome rapprochement.

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