

## **Continuity and Change: New Perspectives on the Evolution of Romance Word Order**

Historical-diachronic studies of Romance word order have been prominent in the research literature since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Meyer-Lübke 1889). However, both descriptive-typological and formal syntactic research in recent decades, combined with insights from digitised corpora, have led to major progress in our understanding of the factors shaping the typological diversity of Modern Romance word order (cf. e.g. Ledgeway 2012; Larrivée 2021; Wolfe 2021; Galves 2024). Drawing on this background, this talk will suggest that the major Romance syntactic isoglosses observable today emerge earlier than is standardly thought. It will also call for a parallel consideration of external and internal factors in assessing the reasons behind Romance word-order stability and change.

Corpus analysis will be presented from six different varieties to support the proposed syntactic uniformity of Early Medieval Romance posited by several scholars (e.g. Benincà 2004), thus arguing against typological dichotomies for this early period which are supposedly motivated by contact (e.g. Hilty 1975). However, we will show that – by as early as 1200 – certain Occitan, Northern Gallo-Romance, and Northern Italo-Romance varieties show divergence in several core syntactic properties: restrictions on the licensing of null arguments, postverbal subjects, and left-peripheral topicalisation and focalisation; and higher verb movement. We will argue that these changes are internally motivated, accelerated by syntactic analogical pressures (cf. Roberts 2007) and yield syntactic systems which differ markedly from syntactically conservative Romance varieties (Southern Italian Dialects, Daco-Romance, and Peninsular Ibero-Romance); the proposal will be that a split between a conservative Romance South and innovative North (Zamoni 2000; Ledgeway 2012) is firmly established by 1300. Furthermore, we will suggest that a subset of Romance varieties have diverged even further in their syntax, typically lacking a host of marked word-order properties involving movement, otherwise present across most of the family (non-standard varieties of Northern Gallo-

Romance, Caribbean Spanish, and Brazilian Portuguese). We will suggest tentatively that although the socio-historical context of each of these varieties is distinct, the marked syntactic divergence in each case has been driven in part by extensive dialect levelling (cf. Kerswill 1994; Trudgill 2008).

The analysis suggests that the most conservative Romance word-order systems have persisted due to stabilising factors internal to the grammar combined with sociohistorical stability. Conversely, the most divergent systems have emerged as a result of analogising pressures within the grammar, which themselves may have been expedited by sociolinguistic factors.

### **Selected References**

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