ON RECONSTRUCTING
THE MIDDLE GROUND[1]

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the introductory lecture in some beginning courses in historical lin-
guistics, the instructor may discuss the ways in which one can explain
points of resemblance between languages. These points of resemblance
arise for one or more of the following reasons: coincidence, contact,
shared inheritance from a single older form, or some aspect of the univer-
sal nature of language.[2] Once coincidence is dismissed, for obvious rea-
sons, the other three factors are defined briefly and the rest of the semester
is spent talking, principally, about two of them: contact and shared inheri-
tance. Language universals, nevertheless, also play a significant role as
well in our understanding of language evolution, although they are usu-
ally viewed primarily through the perspective of typological statements
rather than via the universals themselves. The goal of the present paper is
to explore this diachronic relationship between typology and universals[3]
through some rather familiar data drawn from the history of the Romance
languages. Each of the cases to be studied additionally involves a recon-
struction, undertaken not with the usual goal of discovering a prelanguage
or a protolanguage, but in order to define intermediate stages, whose na-

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2   Baldi (1983: 4-5) is a good discussion of this introductory material. He pro-
    poses, additionally, investigator error or carelessness as an explanation. I be-
    lieve, however, that this item rather falls under metalinguistics. Although
    subsequent correction of the mistake is to be desired, neither investigator er-
    ror in judgment nor its correction shed light of themselves on points of re-
    semblance among languages.
3   I make no claim, of course, for any discovery here. An overview of this issue
    in far more detail than I propose to go into is to be found in Croft (1990). See
    also Comrie (1981).

ture must be hypothesized in situations where both endpoints are more or less well established.

In the first section I will discuss briefly what is meant by 'universal' and how it can be understood from a typological and diachronic perspective. The next section will examine in that light some cases in the history of the Romance languages: the future forms, negation, and word order. Concluding the paper will be some further theoretical discussion on the reconstruction of these middle periods and the role of typology in that process.

2. UNIVERSALS AND TYPOLOGY

Underlying the notion of universals are two well-established ideas, of which the first is that Language, as a human institution, unifies on an abstract level many of the features of individual languages. Many commonalities across languages arise, accordingly, not by coincidence but out of the very nature of human experience and expression.

Secondly, the reason for these commonalities can be found in the universal nature of humankind; that is, the physical and cognitive abilities of human beings (indeed, those things which make them human) lead to the nature of Language.

We must distinguish, however, two kinds of universals, what Comrie (1981: 19-22) calls absolute universals and tendencies. Absolute universals are those which every language has in common with all others and are exceptionless; an example, arising from human articulatory and acoustic systems, is that all languages have vowels and consonants. As a result, these facts cannot really be used, except in a rather broad and probably somewhat uninteresting way, to explain linguistic points of resemblance.

Universal tendencies, on the other hand, have exceptions or variations depending on the degree to which they are universal. Languages either possess or do not possess a given feature; the presence or absence of this feature may be remarkable (as in the case of the few languages of the world whose basic word order is OSV), or simply one of a set of possible variations where the frequency of one as opposed to the other is comparatively unmarked (as in the possibility of SOV or SVO orders). In addition, universal tendencies display what are called implicational hierarchies: an OV basic word order, for example, will often, but not always, imply that the language in question also has postpositions rather than prepositions (cf. Greenberg 1966).

The grouping of languages by their possessing features like prepositions or postpositions is, of course, the link between universals and typology, where typology refers, specifically, to this kind of linguistic classification. Greenberg and his followers have, in the last 30 years and more, productively applied universal tendencies in this way. However, the typological classification of languages is a broader enterprise as well, used to refer to any kind of language classification where the languages are grouped by grammatical behaviors of various sorts, and not just by their basic features revolving around word order.

Universals, both absolutes and tendencies, were originally conceived of as essentially synchronic, meant to be put to use to compare and group languages at some moment in their evolution. I would suggest that, in the case of absolutes, synchronic statements are indeed the only ones which are possible, since true linguistic universals, based on the physical and cognitive reality of humankind, can only change with the evolution of the species. This is a question of deep time and, at least for the present, far beyond the scope of historical linguistics (though cf. Bickerton 1990 for a preliminary hypothesis). Universal tendencies, however, as used in typological statements, can be perceived as changing in measurable time in a specific linguistic context which is independent of the fundamental nature of speakers, but rather arises as a result of the choices that particular languages make. They can therefore be studied in relation to attested language changes and be used as well to reconstruct prehistoric linguistic states. Languages have been shown, for example, to change their basic word order (as will be discussed below) and, with (or possibly because of) the change of word order, to display differences in the various features which are implied by a given order.

The use of typology in guiding the reconstruction of unattested linguistic forms and languages is an extension of the study of attested typological changes which has certainly been well discussed (see Hock 1991 and Trask 1996, for examples). There is, of course, the danger of overstatement of the use of universals in reconstruction, as well as a certain overdependence on their use.[4] However, when these typological principles are used as statements about the probability of the grouping of features or of the direction of change, they can serve as plausibility guides and provide at least weakly predictive hints about places to look for change or for proof of change.

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[4] Lehmann (1974) has been singled out as a particularly salient instance of this overdependence.

But the nature of language does not reside solely in the features any given language displays. There are also both synchronic and diachronic processes, in the widest sense of 'process', which come into play in human language function. These too can be studied from the point of view of typology and universals, and can be extrapolated backwards in time, as permitted by the principle of uniformitarianism, to aid in the reconstruction of unattested linguistic states. One such process is the linguistic cycle. It can be characterized as a sequence of changes (for example, from analytic to synthetic expression and back again) where movement in one direction results in a language state which in turn serves as the beginning point of movement in the opposite direction (Croft 1990: 229-230, Heine et al. 1991: 244-247). The effect is a repetition, over a larger or smaller span of time, of a series of smaller changes occurring either sequentially or cumulatively (or in both such modes) until a specific state is reached and the whole process begins again. One can recapitulate the whole set of events, as Lockwood (1968: 223) does, with the idea that 'History is repeating itself' although, in reality, the repetition brings variation in detail with it. Heine et al. (1991: 245), quote Meillet who suggests that the image to use is not so much a circle, but a spiral, also a cyclical form. Such cyclical movements, viewed broadly, are a form of universal process, and appear once or several times in the development of a large number of individual languages.

3. THE *ESTADO LATENTE* AND ROMANCE SYNTAX

The history of the Romance languages constitutes a well-established body of linguistic data, marked particularly by the amount of relatively secure knowledge which exists concerning their mother language, some form of spoken Latin from the Classical and post-Classical periods of the first centuries of this era.[5] There is also well-established documentation about the daughter languages, with French and Spanish (through a treaty dated 842 in the former and ninth-century glosses in the latter), being the earliest for which we have written records. What is unattested and needs to be reconstructed is, therefore, not the source of the Romance languages, either individually or collectively, but a middle period, between the end of the documented Late Latin era and the earliest documented Romance. It

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[5]   The scope and goal of this paper make it inappropriate to enter into an any more detailed discussion about the precise kind of Latin which served as parent language for Romance; I am being deliberately vague to avoid this somewhat controversial subject.

was during this unattested period that many of the syntactic structures which define Romance, as opposed to Latin, were established.

Menéndez-Pidal (1968: 533ff) referred to what I am calling the middle period as an *estado latente*, a latent state. While this Spanish scholar conceived of the notion primarily as a way of talking about the dark period between the actual events which inspired medieval epic poems and the composition of the earliest versions of the poems as they are known today,[6] he transferred it directly and, I believe, productively, to the history of any language where both end points are well recognized and fairly well documented.

All the standard manuals and studies of the history of the Romance languages recognize, generally without discussion, the nature of an *estado latente*, but there has not been, to my knowledge, any discussion of what recourse one may have to typological statements to hypothesize the steps which occurred during these undocumented (and also underdocumented) periods. In section 4 I have isolated one aspect of each grammatical evolution to illustrate the place of each cycle in the reconstruction of the middle period. It should be noted, however, that the cycles to be discussed in the following section do not, in reality, act independently of each other; word order movement must be brought to bear as well in the grammatical structures which are studied here, while the analytic/synthetic and the vivid language cycles interact as well in each of these cases.

4. EXAMPLES

4.1.   The Romance future

The development of the future construction in Romance is one of the examples most frequently adduced to illustrate the cyclical nature of language change (cf. Givón 1971 and particularly Fleischman 1982). I shall review the facts briefly, using French for the modern data, although Italian or Spanish could as easily be brought to bear.

In Latin, the future was marked by a set of endings added to the present stem of the verb. The construction varied depending on the conjugation class, with a division between the first and second conjugation, where the tense was marked by a particle -*bi*- between the present stem and person/number endings, and the third and fourth conjugations, where the

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6   The few historical events of the Old French *Chanson de Roland*, for example, took place in 778 AD, while the poem itself in an extensive elaboration was composed around 1100.

vowel following the present stem was modified as compared to the present forms:

(1)	1st/2nd Conjugation	3rd/4th Conjugation
	amabit 'she will love'	*mittet* 'she will send' (vs. *mittit*)
	habebit 'she will have'	*veniet* 'she will come' (vs. *venit*)

Setting aside a certain number of what might be called analogical 'errors' such as *scribo* 'I shall write' for Classical *scribam* or *respondeam* 'I shall answer' for *respondebo* (Fleischman 1982: 41), this is the system attested through all stages of Latin. By the earliest documentation of Romance, however, there has arisen a new future with endings which are attached to the infinitive and which are well established as derivations of the Latin verb *habere* 'to have' used with a modal sense of obligation.[7] Of the original Latin future there is no further trace:

(2)   (elle) *aimera, mettra, aura, viendra*
           'she will love, place, have, come'

In contemporary spoken French a new future has again arisen, formed by a conjugated form of the verb *aller* 'to go' which precedes the infinitive:

(3)   .   (elle) *va aimer, avoir, mettre, venir*
           'She is going to love, have, place, come'

What emerges from this pattern is a cyclical movement from a synthetic future in Latin to a (reconstructed) analytic future in early Romance, followed by a second synthetic construction in standard modern French and, once again, an analytic pattern in the contemporary spoken language. As Fleischman (1982: 105) points out, this is a way for a category, to the extent that it holds a reasonably central place in the grammar of a language, to survive the effects of phonological or morphological erosion. Each move to a synthetic form from one which is analytic reinstates, so to speak, the necessary level of phonological material which carries the semantic burden. Each analytic turn reflects a more opaque relationship between form and meaning which remains tolerable for a greater or lesser time to speakers of the language before it is modified.

Of interest to us here is the reconstructed synthetic form of early Romance. What gives Romanists 'permission' to posit this largely unat-

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7   Elsewhere in the Romance languages other modal-like verbs serve as a new future marker: Latin *velle* 'to wish' in Rumanian, and *debere* 'to have to' in some Italian dialects.

tested middle step[8] is that the cycle of syntheticity and analyticity is indeed attested widely, in the later history of Romance future tense expressions as illustrated by (3), and by the development of the future in other languages. English, for example, shows the reduction of *will* and *shall* to [l], with the introduction of *going to* and its further reduction to *gonna* as a preverbal future marker. In SiLuyana, a Bantu language, the verb *tamba* 'to begin' becomes a marker of the future tense, while Hebrew and some Arabic dialects have forms of *to go* used modally (Givón 1973: 917-18). Additionally, there can be found very similar cyclical developments in other grammatical constructions as well. Givón (1971) cites, among other instances, Bantu verb affixes which derive from full verbs, cliticize, lose their semantic identity, and are augmented by other affixes which in turn become clitics as well.

4.2.   Romance negation

A second example of well-established cyclical behavior being extended to the reconstruction of intermediate steps in the evolution of a grammatical structure can be found in the history of Romance negative morphemes.[9] The Latin primary verbal negator was the form *non*, usually placed directly before the verb:

(4)   Puellam *non* videt.
            girl NEG sees
            'He does not see the girl.'

In the earliest French phonological changes have reduced the form to *ne*, also found in preverbal position:

(5)   Il *ne* vout estre ses amis.
            He NEG want to be POSS friend
            'He does not want to be her friend.'

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8   There are some indications in some of the documents of this solution to the *estado latente*; in early Spanish, for example, the move from synthetic to analytic future is not complete, so that an object pronoun can be found between the infinitive and the following conjugated reflex of *habere*. A similar insertion of pronoun between stem and ending was also to be found in literary Portuguese until quite recently.

9   The following discussion is based on the data and part of the analysis found in Winters (1987). The notion of looking at the reconstruction of an unattested middle period has been added in the present paper, while most details on the evolution of negators in French from full nouns have been omitted.

There are, however, new morphemes optionally accompanying this particle, either following or preceding the verb. In the earliest texts they seem to have an emphatic force:

(6)   a.   ...del suen *mie* ne quiert.
            ...of wealth NEG NEG seeks
            '...he seeks not (at all) of his own wealth.'

      b.   ...ne ne cuit *pas* qu' il li enuit.
            NEG NEG believe NEG that he to her is annoying
            '...and does not believe that he is annoying her.'

This sense of reinforcement disappears by the time of later Old French and the modern standard has generalized *pas* as the unmarked, obligatory negative, accompanied in careful written and spoken French by *ne* (7a) and elsewhere occurring without it (7b):

(7)   a.   Elle ne prépare *pas* de viande.
            she NEG prepares NEG of meat
            'She doesn't prepare/cook meat.'

      b.   Elle comprend *pas*.
            she understands NEG
            'She doesn't understand.'

Modern French has, additionally, a series of phrases which can follow *pas* (used with or without *ne*) to reinforce the negation:

(8)   a.   Elle (ne) comprend *pas du tout*.
            she (NEG) understand NEG at all
            'She doesn't understand at all.'

      b.   Nous (ne) voyons pas *âme qui vive*.
            we (NEG) see NEG soul which may live
            'We don't see a soul.'

What must be reconstructed here, in the development from Latin to French, is a stage where nouns like *pas* 'step' and *mie* 'crumb' were not only optional reinforcement of negation, as they are in early Old French, but had not yet grammaticized into abstract negators which had lost most of the semantic content of the nouns they came from. By the earliest attestations, the necessary relationship between the choice of reinforcer and the verb which is being negated has disappeared, so that *pas*, no longer associated with 'step', is used far more widely than with motion verbs (as with *cuit* 'believe' in 6b) and *mie* with verbs whose objects cannot be reduced to extremely small physical subunits like crumbs (as with *quiert* 'seek' in 6a).

It is very likely that at one stage between vivid language use and grammatical negator these expressions were negative polarity items; this

stage must be reconstructed at a time when there was still a semantic relationship between the noun and the verb it negated. We do not, for example, say that someone didn't 'mow a soul', meaning the smallest possible unit which can be mowed; if indeed there is an appropriate polarity unit in modern English, it would have to be something like 'a blade of grass'.

Again, it is the existence of this cycle of vivid reinforcement to which negation is particularly susceptible, with the loss of emphatic meaning of the intensifiers in turn replaced or extended by new ones, which principally allows for the reconstruction of full noun status for these modern negators. The history of the Germanic languages shows a similar negative cycle, with the modern unmarked English negator *not* coming from Old English *nawiht* 'not a thing'; German *nicht*, from Old High German *ni eo wiht* is a parallel development.

This cycle of reinforcement and weakening is amply illustrated, as well, in non-negative lexical items like English *awful* which as an adjective has lost all connections with *awe* and as the adverb *awfully* has further grammaticized into a rather weak intensifier:

(9)   That's awfully interesting.

The statement in (9), for example, is not a particularly strong compliment in American English at least, and certainly does not imply that the object being thus evaluated has inspired some kind of religious or otherwise spiritual intensity. The contemporary form *awesome*, used primarily by American teenagers as an intensifier, serves as a renewal of part of the cycle here since it has (or at least had several years ago when it was coined) much greater intensity than the older form *awful* which it seems to be replacing.[10]

4.3.   Word order changes

As a brief third example, let us consider Latin and Romance word order. Latin, though to some extent a free word order language, had a definite statistical preference for verb final constructions. By the beginning of the Old French period, verb second was the norm, although with many verb final constructions still attested. Modern French is clearly verb second. Again, a period of *estado latente* makes it necessary to reconstruct some of the intermediate stages in this change in basic word order. Here another

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[10] In its most literal sense of 'full of awe' or 'inspiring awe' *awesome* can be heard in the speech of older Americans as well; I just heard it applied, by a speaker in her 50s, to a talk by Nobel laureat Elie Wiesel on human rights.

cycle intervenes, one which falls most clearly into the more restricted way typological statements have been construed, as mentioned in section one. This cycle is a movement from OV to VO and back again, found cross-linguistically in many languages and language families (cf. Givón 1971 for a discussion).

Since it is such a broad change, it cannot be used, as the cycle of future tense construction or of the coining of new negatives can be used, to fill in particular unattested steps. However, it provides a point of reference as to the reality of such changes. Knowledge of this cycle has also allowed historians of Romance to look to Latin for indications of the beginning (or at least previous points) in the movement, and indeed, while Latin as a primarily OV language has some postpositions (*causa* and *cum*, for example) it shows mostly prepositions. Relative clauses, additionally, follow their head, with few exceptions, as in canonical VO languages.

5. CONCLUSIONS

To summarize, I have proposed here that the linguistic cycle is a valuable tool for the reconstruction of the *estado latente*, the intermediate stages in language evolution for which there is no documentation despite adequate attestations of both the mother language and the comparatively early stages of the daughters. The development of the future in Romance can be described through a cycle of synthetic and analytic structures, while negation is at least partially accounted for through the introduction of vivid language expressions which then lose their intensity and must be replaced by others, and Romance word order reflects a pendular movement from basic OV to VO and back again.

Several considerations remain to be discussed, however, to reconnect these reconstructions with the notions of universals and typology. First of all, it must be stated that the cycle is indeed a universal. Following the discussion in Heine et al. (1991: 245-46), I would suggest, however, that it is a universal tendency and certainly not an absolute: instances of specific cycles are widespread in the languages of the world, but certainly not in all languages at all times. Additionally, some cyclical developments can be found at the individual lexical level (the example of *awful*, for example), at the level of a grammatical (sub)system (the Romance future), or at the level of an entire language or language family (basic word order phenomena in light of the many structures which have been found to be entailed).

From a diachronic point of view, a typology can be established based on a determination of where in the cycle a given construction finds itself at the

latest point documented in the mother language and in the earliest attes-
tations of the daughters. Here, precisely, is the intersection of typology
and reconstruction in such cases. Once the language stages are situated in
relationship to a given cycle, the middle ground is established both by
viewing earlier or later stages of the language which document the steps
missing in the *estado latente*, and, concurrently, by examining other lan-
guages which display the same cycle. Let me emphasize here that this is a
well-established diachronic method; my goal has been not to propose it
since, obviously, it has been used for a very long time, but to emphasize its
reliance on the notion of the linguistic cycle.

I have deliberately avoided until now the question of whether there is
one cycle involved in all of these grammatical changes, or if each matter I
have discussed (and any number of others not discussed here) points to a
separate cycle, all of which interact to a greater or lesser extent, as was
suggested briefly above. A full answer would involve a thorough exami-
nation of grammaticalization, which depends crucially on parts of the
(sub)cycle(s) studied here, and even recourse to the notion of drift; all of
this is beyond the scope of the present paper. I would suggest, as a working
hypothesis, that there is at least the single cycle of attrition and rebuilding
whose subcomponents, however, depend on different diachronic processes
(cf. also Fleischman 1982: 40). Whether the pendular movement of word
order change is a contributor to this cycle or a separate phenomenon en-
tirely is a matter to be considered elsewhere.

The question of time depth then emerges: is there an amount of time
minimally required for a change to go through various parts of the cycle?
In other words, must the *estado latente* be of a certain length to avoid too
restricted a field and too shallow a time depth? Fleischman (1982: 110), for
example, builds into her definition of the cycle that 'they represent an
evolutionary pattern documented over a long span of linguistic develop-
ment'. 'Long span', however, is not a precise measure, and the answer
seems to be, rather, that it depends on the kind of cycle or subsection of a
cycle; a lexical change, like the emergence and disappearance of vivid, em-
phatic uses of words and expressions can occur very quickly, while basic
word order changes, at the other end of the scale, are necessarily slow (cf.
Heine et al. 1991: 244 for a similar view in terms of grammaticalization).
For reconstruction, therefore, the cycle can be useful to different degrees, a
conclusion which is neither unexpected nor surprising.

Finally, let us return to the four explanations of points of resemblance
among languages, or rather the three that remain when purely anecdotal
coincidence is set aside. Universal explanations, particularly in the form of

typological statements, interact in various ways with the two fundamentally competing remaining options. Both genetic inheritance and borrowing can be informed by cyclical phenomena since the cycle can act on borrowed material (intensifiers come immediately to mind) as well as on genetically inherited ones. We have, therefore, not an unordered list of explanations for resemblance, but rather a hierarchy, where both the competing options are, in some ways, subsumed by universal, typological explanations. The result, therefore, is that reconstruction, whether finding its source in borrowing or solely in inherited material, depends rather crucially on various aspects of universal tendencies toward cyclical evolution.

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