Germanic and Romance. Probing the similarities and differences

There is a large literature in the field of comparative and historical syntax of drawing comparison between Germanic and Romance varieties. This includes a particular tradition which argues that the earlier languages were more alike than their present day counterparts (see in particular Adams 1989; Fontana 1993; Mathieu 2007 and Franco 2009). The most prominent example of this similarity is the Verb Second constraint, which is characteristic of many early and contemporary Germanic languages (see Vikner 1995 and Walkden 2014) and argued to be operative in Medieval Romance (Thurneysen 1892 et seq.). The workshop will aim to develop a more nuanced understanding of both the parallels and points of contrast between these two families, through synchronic comparison of phenomena in previous historical stages and diachronic consideration of the relevant pathways of change.

The time is right for such an exercise on several grounds. First, research in recent decades has equipped the historical linguist with a range of large-scale corpora for both Germanic and Romance (see, for example, in the case of Romance the Tycho BraheParsed Corpus of Historical Portuguese, the Base de Français Médiéval and the Opera del Vocabolario Italiano alongside the Penn Parsed Corpus of Historical English, the Icelandic Parsed Historical Corpus and the Corpus of Historical Low German for Germanic). This affords a methodologically more robust basis for comparison than has previously been possible empirically. Second, a more nuanced understanding has been reached in recent years of previously little-reported variation amongst the early Germanic and Romance varieties (see Walkden 2014 and Wolfe 2015), which has so far not been extensively exploited for comparison between Germanic and Romance. Third, much controversy has been generated over whether reported Romance and Germanic parallels are genuine (see Mathieu 2006 vs. Labelle 2007 on Stylistic Fronting and Benincà 2013 vs. Kaiser 2002 on Verb second). We therefore set out to evaluate the relevant arguments in more depth, by considering a wider body of empirical evidence.

By probing in more depth than has previously been the case, we seek to establish just how similar two well-studied branches of the Indo-European family are, what role language contact has played in generating possible resemblances and whether systematic comparison of Germanic and Romance varieties can help us identify new cycles of linguistic change (on which see Van Gelderen 2011).

Against this backdrop we welcome comparative treatments of Germanic and Romance data which present new perspectives on the phenomena in question and theories of linguistic change. Contributions of both a historical-synchronic and diachronic nature are welcome on, but not limited to, the following phenomena:
The C-system
  o Under what conditions may the complementiser be omitted (Franco 2014; Douglas 2016)? Are these conditions stable diachronically or is their variation? Is there a link between complementiser deletion and embedded V2 (as in Modern German) or the use of the subjunctive mood (as in Modern Italian)? Are there languages that do not permit any kind of complementiser deletion?
  o Do complementisers have a verbal or nominal status and how does that relate to their featural content? Can the notion of Feature Economy (Van Gelderen 2009) help us understand the evolution of complementisers in Germanic and Romance and are their common pathways of change in both families? How does the internal nature of complementisers relate to their syntax historically?
  o Can comparison of complementiser doubling/recomplementation patterns in both Germanic and Romance yield new insights into this phenomenon (see Poole 2013 on Old Spanish, Ribeiro & Torres Morais 2012 on Old Portuguese, Salvesen 2014 on Old French, and the Syntactic Atlas of Dutch Dialects for seemingly parallel Dutch data)? Does the approach of Rizzi (1997) with complementisers occurring in Fin⁰ and Force⁰ within an articulated left periphery capture the full range of data historically or are refinements of this approach required (Munaro 2015)?
  o What positions may be identified in the left periphery of the languages in question? Do left peripheral elements occur in the order described by previous work on the left periphery (Rizzi 1997, Benincà & Poletto 2004, Hinterhölzl & Petrova 2009)? Does the structure of the left periphery change diachronically?

Hypotaxis and parataxis
  o To what extent are fronted clauses integrated into the clause? Does this change diachronically (see Donaldson 2012 on Old French and Haegeman & Greco 2016 for West Flemish)? Are certain types of embedded clauses more likely to be paratactic than others?
  o Methodologically, how do we differentiate between the two on the basis of written texts (see Benincà 2006 for clitic pronouns as diagnostics in Old Romance)?
  o Given the frequent claim that parataxis represents an archaic option in the Indo-European languages (see Kiparsky 1995 in particular), is this always the case, or could it represent innovation in certain contexts?

Null arguments
  o Under what conditions are null arguments licensed in the languages under investigation and how does this change diachronically (see Vanelli, Renzi & Benincà 1987 for Old Romance alongside Axel & Weiss 2011 and Cognola 2016 on Old High German)?
  o What tests can we use to distinguish between different points on the null argument typology (Roberts & Holmberg 2010) in historical texts (see Walkden 2014 for early Germanic)?
  o Do early Germanic and Romance share a common inventory of null arguments, or are null elements attested in one branch which do not exist in the other?
Although much attention has focussed on null subjects historically in both branches, what analysis should be put forward for null objects and the conditions under which they are licensed?

Can we identify a cyclic change involving null arguments in Germanic and Romance (i.e. Null Topic > Null Subject as in Wolfe 2015)?

**OV and VO**

- Where do Old Germanic and Old Romance fit in with Haider's (2010) OV Syndrome?
- On formal grounds, how do we distinguish between "genuine" cases of OV order and types of scrambling and middle-field movement which are governed primarily by discourse features when taking evidence from historical texts?
- Are there residual OV effects in languages that are generally considered to be VO languages? If so under which discourse-pragmatic conditions is OV order licenced, and can we identify common patterns of change in the loss of OV in both Germanic and Romance (see Zaring 2011 on Old French and the comparative early Spanish-English study of Mackenzie & van der Wurff 2012)?
- Are OV orders an possibility of scrambling independent properties or linked to other parts of the grammar (cf. Poletto 2014 on Old Italian)?

**Pronominal system**

- What is the structure of the (subject and object) pronominal system and how has this changed historically? Could they be fitted into Cardinaletti & Starke’s (1999) three way system: strong, weak and clitics? Do we see parallels in the emergence of subject agreement patterns in Romance (Roberts 1993; Poletto 1995, 2000) and Germanic (Fuss 2005)?
- How do we account for the behaviour of elements that are clearly clitic-like? Is their placement the result of phonological requirements, or is syntax the key to understanding their behaviour?
- To what extent do pronouns follow Wackernagel's law (Wackernagel 1892)? How do the licensing conditions for second position elements change from early Indo-European (Hale 1987) onwards and are there common patterns in Germanic and Romance?
- Quirky subjects are well known in Germanic, but are also attested in Old Romance (Mathieu 2006). Do they occur with the same kind of verbs, or may we observe semantic differences between the language families? What insight does this provide us as to the nature of dative subjects?

**Resumptive structures**

- Both Germanic and Romance languages make an extensive use of resumptive particles after initial elements, thus creating a word order in which the finite verb occurs in third position of the linear string (Salvesen 2016). What kind of resumptive elements may be identified?
- Are the environments where this particle occurs the same in the Germanic and Romance languages?
- What is the relation between the resumptive particle and the complementiser in embedded contexts?

**Stylistic Fronting**
How do we define Stylistic Fronting in the light of Germanic (Maling 1990 [1980]; Holmberg 2000) and Romance (Mathieu 2006; Fischer 2014) historical data?

Does an analysis based on Germanic data capture the Romance facts or is a loser definition of the phenomenon needed (Mathieu 2006, 2009, 2012, Franco 2009, Salvesen 2009, 2011)? If a wider definition is adopted, how do we differentiate Stylistic Fronting from other movement operations in matrix and embedded clauses?

The traditional definition of Stylistic Fronting leans heavily on the absence of a subject. How does that fit in with languages that regularly has pro drop, or in which the postverbal nominal subject does not necessarily leave the vP (Salvesen & Bech 2014)?

**Subject positions**

Is it possible to point to a canonical subject position in the history of Germanic and Romance? Is this position stable in the history of the languages?

What are the interactions between the subject position(s) and the Case assignment properties?

What tests can be applied to diagnose the position of the subject?

How do quirky subjects behave compared to ordinary subjects?

**V2**

Under which conditions may V2 violations occur, creating apparent V1 and V3 (or V*) patterns?

Recent research has pointed in the direction that V2 targets different heads in the left periphery, thus accounting for observed differences in word order (Poletto 2002, Walkden 2015, Wolfe 2015). How do these observations fit in with the data at hand, and how may embedded V2 be explained in light of these analyses?

We hope the workshop would lead us to a better understanding of the processes of change at play in the Germanic and Romance languages, and relatedly, the structure of historical variation for the phenomena in question.

**Call for papers**

We invite papers that address topics related to the difference between Romance and Germanic languages in a historical perspective. Papers that specifically draw on data from the two language families will be given priority in the selection process. However, it is also of interest to see typical Germanic properties in a Romance variety and vice versa.

Presentations should be scheduled for 20 minutes + 10 minutes for comments and questions.
References


Cognola, Federica. “Asymmetric pro-drop in Old Italian and Old High German”. Presented at the 2nd Traces of History workshop, Ullershov gård. 2016.


Mathieu, Éric. “Stylistic Fronting in Old French”. In *Probus*, 18, p 219–266. 2006


Munaro, Nicola. 2015. ‘Complementizer Doubling and Clausal Topics in (early) Italo-Romance’. Presented at the 41st Intercontro di Grammatica Generativa, Perugia, Italy.


