TOWARD A COMMON HISTORY OF THE GERMANIC AND EUROPEAN LANGUAGES IN THE MIDDLE AGES[1]

Seeing the development of earlier forms of speech in the terms of the history of a particular language is something we just take for granted, even if we are principally ready and willing to deny the reality of such a view. At the same time, everybody is able to identify a considerable number of developments which are common to the history of 'individual' languages. For instance, the history of the Western and Northern Germanic languages shows a number of points in common; not only in their prehistory, but also in the successive stages of their written use and their well-known modern histories.

In a very interesting article which has served as one of the main sources of inspiration for this paper, Horst Haider Munske (1995: 399) complains on

> wie sehr unsere neueren Philologien im Korsett genetisch begründeter Sprachgruppen eingeschnürt sind, wie sehr insbesondere die Philologien im Bereich der germanischen Sprachen (…) nunmehr auf eine Nationalsprache bezogen sind und wie sehr dabei die Eingebundenheit der Sprachgeschichte unseres Raumes in die europäische Geschichte verlorengeht oder eine teleologisch geprägte Darstellung findet.

We tend to articulate the history of language in terms of individual histories of individual languages. This method, as perfectly well known, poses lots of problems, because the historical, geographical, but also 'linguistic' limits of a particular language are everything but clear: synchronically, and even more so diachronically.

[1] This is a revised version of a plenary talk delivered at the SELIM Conference in Murcia, 2003. My thanks go to all those who offered me their comments, observations, and criticism.

SOME PROBLEMS WITH THE HISTORICAL DEFINITION OF NATIONAL LANGUAGES

Let me show a straightforward example of such difficulties. Of course there was no Afrikaans in the medieval period, so we tend to think that it would make no sense to include a chapter on that period in any *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse taal*. In fact, such histories begin with the Dutch settlements in Southern Africa. However, the language did exist in the Middle Ages, too, only in a form we prefer to call Dutch, *Nederlands*, because the area were the dialects were spoken which would –in due time– 'give birth' to Afrikaans, corresponds (more or less) to one where some present-day Dutch dialects are still in use. As the name, Afrikaans, refers to Africa, it is fairly obvious that no such European language was ever spoken in southern Africa in the Middle Ages: there was no Medieval Afrikaans. So, the right place for that chapter of the history of Afrikaans is something like *De nederlandse taal in de Middeleeuwen*, 'the Dutch language in medieval times'; it sounds extremely odd, however, because we prefer to refer to a language only when 'it really existed' and, moreover, the history of that language cannot in principle refer to a different language, even if its at the origin of the one we are studying: no chapter on the history of Latin would (normally: there are exceptions!) find its place in a history of Spanish. Also, why not talk of 'the English language of the third millennium BC' (it is sometimes done, however, even if we use the term 'Indo-European' instead of 'English')?

In the Middle Ages it is quite difficult indeed to talk of the individual languages in an straightforward way, as things seem to have been quite mixed up at the time (when were they not, in fact?). We frequently lack information on certain periods of certain 'languages', but have a way of assigning historical labels which forces us to talk of Middle Frisian when there is really not much Old Frisian to begin with, and of an Old Icelandic which corresponds chronologically with other Middle-Languages while the language itself cannot be older than the end of the 9th century… a period which is not attested… in Iceland, although it is the 'same' language elsewhere, in the form of West Norse Runic inscriptions, for example.

Moreover, it is frequently not quite clear in which language certain texts were written. We know about the rather indefinable language of the German

Hildebrandslied, but something similar happened with the more-or-less-old Dutch translation of the Psalms. As it seems, medieval writers –poets, but also scribes, in a way– did not care much about the concrete language they were using: we know there existed no such notion as 'national language'.

For instance, did the Limburgs (Dutch? Flemish? Belgian?) poet Hendrik van Veldeke (12th c.) write in Limburgs, in Dutch, or in German? In fact, his language can be defined as a form of literary German with Dutch-Limburgish elements. But the same thing happens elsewhere. The Catalan troubadours wrote in… Catalan? In Provençal? In some mixture? Even the greatest of the Catalan (and/or Valencian) medieval poets, Ausiàs March, used a language which is difficult to define precisely. But well, Chaucer's English also has at least some French in it. So, some of the most important literary texts of the Middle-X period, everywhere in Western Europe were written in some kind of 'mixed language'; or, more precisely perhaps, in a specialised language which did not necessarily coincide with the language of the territory: witness Alfonso the Learned using Galician-Portuguese for his non-religious, lyric poetry.

Of course, it is well known that the German Minnesinger's language is dialectically fairly indefinable, so that they were indeed using a 'supraregional' language. At the same time, their poems were sung to tunes which were frequently of French origin (or was it Provençal?). But again, we all know a couple of things on the relations between the Provençal *troubadours* and the North French *trouvères*, and the degree of coincidence in their metres, styles, melodies, but also language. According to the degree of possible intelligibility among the languages involved, the mixing yielded different results, and in the case of English, a nice combination of English and French words, metres, grammatical features, styles, and the like can be found.

But well, these literary mixtures –and one should keep in mind that my catalogue has been far from complete– are typical of the intellectual atmosphere of Western Europe in the whole of the Middle Ages –and later, but also before the Middle Ages proper. It is impossible to write a history of any individual literature of Medieval Western Europe –and beyond– without due consideration of the other literatures: or is there in fact one Western-European Medieval Literature, with many different particular forms of

expression? A very easy example: the English literature of the Middle ages cannot be understood without a knowledge of Latin and French literature, but also of the Continental Saxons (*Genesis*?), the Dutch (*Elkerlijck* – *Everyman*, but also the Psalms) and the Scandinavian (from *Beowulf* to *Havelok*… and so much more); needless to say, the Italian, too. And others.

Quite frequently, one finds the same texts reproduced –more than translated– from South to North: the **French** *Alexandreis*, written in **Latin**, reappears in the **Castilian** (or is it **Aragonese**?) *Libre de Aleixandre*, but also in Abbot Brandur Jónsson's **Icelandic** *Alexanders saga mikla* (written in a language which they used to call *Dansk Tunga*, **Danish**). Clearly, then, there is a cultural, including a literary, continuum. Certainly, the Christian church played a significant role, but not only the church: when we find Western European cultural elements in non-Christian areas, e.g. before the Christian religion was inoculated through the teaching of missionaries and the decrees of kings, but also through the wounds opened by spears and swords (parts of both Germanic and Finnic Scandinavia before the 12th c., but also the Baltic countries, etc.), and they are not at all infrequent, it is not a matter of religion, but a matter of culture –and language.

A COMMON EUROPEAN PLAYGROUND

So, there seems to have always existed a wide set of common elements in European culture and, correspondingly, in the individual European cultures: a set of relations, combinations, confusions, which are sometimes reinforced by the historical developments: first the expansion of Agriculture, and (maybe with it) the Indopeuropean peoples and especially their languages, then the Roman Empire, then Christianity, then French Culture, now Anglo-American culture hand in hand with globalisation. Of course, not just in a simple line: the Roman Empire goes together with Christianity for some time, while the Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew cultures, together with the Kingdom of Castile as their main intermediary and agent of continental transmission, also played a very significant role. And the Normans settled in the British Islands and Normandy, but also in Sicily, while the Catalans made their presence felt in Constantinople, where the Normans had also been and which the Turks –and Islam– will conquer.

Could anyone just think of writing purely separate national histories of the European… *countries*, without a common guideline? Of the European *States*? However, we take as the default case the continuity of a certain number of national, political, religious, but also cultural and even linguistic units: let us call them France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Sweden, Germany, England (or The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, plus the Isle of Man? Or the British Isles, or…?). We all know that these units represent no 'natural' units in any possible sense, witness the incredibly many changes in their borders, their forms of organisation, etc. through just modern times. Of course, there is a certain competition around: which is the 'oldest' State in Europe? The winner is… well, nobody can know for sure.

THE PROBLEM OF THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE

All these things are well known, although they also are –from time to time– the matter of considerable debate, not least due to the centrifugal tendencies of contemporary nationalisms, which try to emphasise the differences (what seems to me fully right in itself) while frequently reproducing the old schema of the centralistic States.

This implies the need for a special, individual language –or form of a language, in the worst case, or ways of using the language in the best case– because otherwise an element is lost in the equation:

> a national (ethnic?) unit → a cultural unit → a political unit → a linguistic unit

To this, an unfortunate last element is added much too frequently: **a religious unit**.[2] But as for language, the old problems will be multiplied with the need to see these languages or forms of language as units which are moreover associated to a certain, more or less linear history. But then, if one has such a national-cultural and political unit, one also needs a (national, cultural, political) history, to which a history of the language has to be added.

[2] All this is still visible in the developments within the European Union, including the attempts, by rightist parties under the lead of Pope John Paul II, to see the Christian religion as one of the bases for the construction of Europe, with its *state-like* organisation; language, on the other hand, is a still unsolved problem.

Could it be that, for instance in present day Spain, new, relatively independent histories have to be written for, say, Andalusian, and Canarian Spanish? Some people would like to see –and try to propose– the history of Valencian as different from that of Catalan, having just their Latin origin as a common link, shared with Spanish (i.e. Castilian) and so many other languages. Most people probably think that we can still talk of a History of the Catalan language and a History of the Spanish language, where separate mention would be made of the history of separate dialects, variants, or whatever: a history of Canarian, Bolivian, Murcian Spanish… The problem, for many people –including some politicians… and linguists– is that such a thing could 'stink of dialectology', with the corresponding devaluation of the language that is seen as corresponding to that 'national unit'.

Let us think *fractally* for a moment. Could it be that there is succession of ever-increasing units, corresponding to a single one of the highest order? Say, a *History of Human Language* that could be split, at a second level, in a number of *Areal Linguistic Histories* with, at a third level, a new split in a number of *Regional Language Histories*, to end with the *Histories of Individual Languages* and, finally, with the *Histories of the individual varieties* of the individual languages?

In fact, that is what we usually do. There are some attempts to write about somewhat approximating 'common human language' in terms of its general historical developments, and then the historical study of linguistic Macrogroups, such as *Nostratic* and the like, or Greenberg and Ruhlen's prehistoric *macrofamilies*, or Fortescue's *meshes*; then there are the more concrete, individual 'family groups': Indo-european+Finnic, for instance, or Semito-Camitic, or Uralic-Altaic etc. Then, a new step brings us to the traditional families: Indo-European, Finnic, Semitic, Athabaskan. Then, to the groups and subgroups: Germanic → North-West Germanic → West Germanic → Anglo-Frisian → Anglian → Northumbrian → Newcastle English.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AND THEIR APPARENTLY SEPARATE HISTORIES

But see that there is a difference with the situation of culture in general: there, we talked about influences, about the extension of fashions, habits, tendencies, in such a way that the individual cultures have to be seen as little more than idiosyncratic components, or elements, of a much wider reality. Of course, culture is a matter of social relation and interaction, which freely crosses any political, linguistic, social, economic or ethnic borders. The same happens with literature.

But when we go on to language, 'genetics' takes the place of 'social interaction', so to speak. That is: in the history of culture –and literature– nobody would think of drawing a more or less straight, uninterrupted line directly linking, say, Indo-European culture and contemporary Yorkshire culture; that is, present-day Yorkshire culture (whatever it may be) cannot be defined as Yorkshirean, Northumbrian, Anglian, Anglo-Frisian, West-Germanic, North-West-Germanic, Germanic, Old European, Indo-European. However, the linguistic ancestry of the Yorkshire dialect is taken to be precisely that, apart from some influences due to historical accident: the Yorkshire dialect is an Indo-European language, just in the same way as I am a Bernárdez: everybody from individuals to languages and nations, apparently needs a well-defined line of descent.

Of course, that is not fully right, so that we first have to decide what we understand under 'line of descent'. In my case, for instance, my male lineage goes back directly until, at least, the first quarter of the 15th century. And that is fine, because we use a male line of parental descent. That is, if I take my father, then my father's father, then his father, his father, his father, etc., we could get to a direct ancestor of mine in the early 15th century, don Nuño Bernárdez, from Ourense. It would be different if we took the female lineage, but it could also be definable as a straight line, as among the Navajo, for instance. We just do not care for all the rest: there is no problem in my mother's mother's line being mixed up sometime back in the past, if I am only considering my male lineage. But of course, I have no idea whether a certain male Bernárdez who appears in the records of my direct line of ancestry and who lived, say, in the mid 18th century, was the son of his father; biologically, that is. If he were not, my genetic line of descent would be

interrupted. In fact, we take legal ancestry as the only basis, and real genetic relations are just 'assumed'. This is the reality. We just have to remember the many dynastic wars –in Europe, but also elsewhere– that were due to this type of 'accident'.

But we take this not to be possible for languages: apart from such things as Pidgins and Creoles, and other 'horrendous' forms of language, as the pseudo-German *Rotwelsch* or the Spanish-Gypsy *caló*,[3] languages show an enviable decency in their lineage: in spite of everything, English is an Indo-European language; it is even Germanic (although it does not look much like the other Germanic languages in so many respects), and West Germanic. The same holds for all the other European Languages, *mutatis mutandis* and *ceteris paribus*. Confluent developments are readily accepted, but they are somewhat anomalous exceptions and, in the last term, they do not falsify the clear genetic lineage of languages: in the *Sprachbund* of the Balkan Peninsula, in spite of the existence of developments which cross the genetic boundaries, Macedonian continues to be (South) Slavonic, whereas Rumanian is a Romance language, Albanese is what it is and Greek is Greek.

LANGUAGE *MESHES* AND THE INEVITABILITY OF LANGUAGE CONTACT

Are things necessarily thus? I mean, is it necessarily so that we have to pay special –or even exclusive– attention to the genetic ancestry of languages when trying to analyse their history, taking for granted that a clear genetic ancestry is always there, unchanged and unchangeable, and that the accidents that may obscure its filiations are just that: accidents which do not alter the essence of things?

Linguists devoted to the study of language families with a much weaker scholarly tradition and also, most importantly, whose languages have only recently been attested, do not have things so clear all the time and have been forced to propose, as an important possibility, the idea that a language's history cannot always be best understood in genetic terms. Michael Fortescue (1998; cited in Bakker 2003), when studying the 'Language relations across

[3] Which has kept the original Romani words, while using the grammar of Spanish – with a few exceptions, such as the Masculine-Feminine opposition seen in *gachó-gachí*, *caló-calí*, etc., and little more.

the Bering Strait', proposes a term, to add to the traditional ones of *family*, *stock*, and the like: *mesh*. This is the 'term for a set of languages that share part of their histories, either because they are genetically related or because they have influenced one another in other ways, for instance because they were spoken in adjacent areas or by bilingual groups' (Bakker 2003: 151). In quite recent times, other scholars have shown the extent to which contact and diffusion over and across non-genetic borders can rapidly modify the structures of a language (Aikhenvald 2003, Schieffelin 2002).

Could it be that the linguistic situation in Western Europe, now as well as in the Middle Ages, were more a matter of a linguistic *mesh* than of a number of well-defined genetic groupings? It might thus be that in addition to the histories of the individual languages (English, etc.) or of the genetic groupings (history of the Germanic, or of the West Germanic languages, etc.) we should try to write the history of the *Western European Linguistic Mesh* in the Middle Ages. And it is my idea that such an approach could be quite illuminating, also for the individual histories: some changes would be understood as more or less generalised tendencies, active in large parts of the European continent, independently of the genetic relations of the individual languages.

Dixon's (1997: 29) position is similar: "the family tree model, while appropriate and useful in many circumstances, is not applicable everywhere and cannot explain every type of relationship between languages. We need a more inclusive model, which integrated together the ideas of family tree and of diffusion area".

Within our entrenched genetic view of language history, it is frequently quite useful, when studying a particular change in a particular language, to look at similar developments in related languages; say, we can study Old English Breaking in the framework of the other Germanic languages (Howell 1991). And a reconstruction of Common Germanic sentence structure (Hopper 1975) can provide us with many useful insights in the possible ways of development of the daughter languages. Of course, all this is what genetic linguistics, for instance Indo-European linguistics, or Germanic linguistics, is about.

Without leaving that genetic view, we can accept diffusion, language contact even between non genetically related languages, which would yield the possibility of 'language mixing', creolisation, and pidginisation. But this is not the point I am aiming at here.

THE EUROPEAN LINGUISTIC *MESH*

My idea, and my proposal, is that the languages in Europe, irrespective of their genetic affiliation, behave as a *mesh*, as a unit where changes can begin and extend in the same way as within a genetic group –a family– or a single language –which ultimately is also a group of variants.

That is, the European languages develop –during the Middle Ages, as I shall mainly limit my observations to that period– in an unitary fashion and as a whole; i.e., there is no need to posit particular points or foci of origin for every single change: changes may arise at the same time, or closely at the same time, in different parts of the continent. The rationale for this proposal is that language –as any other cultural, or social phenomenon– allows individuals 'to do things'. Whenever the need arises to do something new, people try to find the best and easiest way to do it. Linguistic changes among varieties or related and unrelated languages, therefore, take the form of *invisible hand phenomena*, similarly to the processes that take place among individuals in a linguistic, cultural, etc., community (Keller 1990).

Of course, when language is involved a difficulty arises which is not always present in other forms of social interaction: languages can be, or be not, mutually intelligible, so that direct imitation is much more difficult across genetic boundaries. Or, more precisely: we have to define a continuum of linguistic similarity and intelligibility, reaching from languages which, while not mutually intelligible, enjoy the benefits of bi- or multilingualism – remember that this, not strict monolingualism, has been the most frequent situation for centuries (or millennia)–, to languages which are only partially – or even just slightly– intelligible, to languages with a high degree of intelligibility. Of course, the speed and scope of the 'imitation' will depend on the degree of intelligibility –among other things I shall not enter into here–: genetic relationship will be subordinate to this.

Centring our attention, when doing language history, in the evolution of the individual languages and the genetic groups brings about the danger of seeing change teleologically: We know that linguistic change is not teleological except in an extremely abstract sense. But we tend to see changes in terms of the 'final state' achieved, i.e., most frequently in terms of some modern phenomena.

For instance, we may take the Received Pronunciation of the originally long vowels (of Middle English) as the concluding point of the Great Vowel Shift. *Teleology*, in this respect, would be interpretable as follows: «the changes that have affected the ME vowels lead to the form XX». It is 'as if' the changes would have 'intended' to yield the present-day result. It does not matter much whether we choose as the final point in the development the Cockney vowels, or the General American vowels, or whatever: the present-day vowels are there because they were due to a series of historical changes; or, inversely, the changes happen because they will lead to a certain result. Similarly, the development of the perfect tenses in English, viewed as a purely internal development, leads to a certain result –which coincides with the modern values and uses of the tenses. That is, although nobody would express it in this way, it is as if the English language 'were looking for' its present-day state.

And what if other languages undergo processes similar to those of English? We tend to see this coincidence in four possible ways: (a) as independent developments which yield similar results by mere chance; (b) as 'false coincidences', as the resulting stages are only superficially similar; (c) as the result of some inherent tendencies in the language group; (d) as the result of influence from one language on the other.

AN APPROXIMATION TO SOME CASE-STUDIES

But let us –much too briefly– examine a few changes of great importance in the history of English, which begin or develop during the Middle Ages. We shall see that very similar changes happen in other regions of Europe, within the Germanic group but also outside it: genetic boundaries do not seem to be of paramount importance in this respect. My point is that for reasons which can be sought in the European culture of a particular point of

time, and which influence the communicative needs of people, the languages develop the tools necessary to satisfy the new communicative needs felt over a wider or limited area.

Recent studies on processes of on-going linguistic change in a number of communities have shown that very rapid and dramatic social change which includes new communicative needs provokes –in an extremely short period of time, of simply a few years, or of one generation,[4] the development and/or extension of new forms of expression: from the vocabulary to quite a number of important linguistic elements, including syntax and morphology. In fact, a rapid change in the communicative needs –that is, in the need to do something inside a society or a social group leads to a number of changes in the structure of the language –in the understanding that linguistic structures have to be viewed in terms of usage and as a result of usage, something that should not be controversial any more.

MARKING THE DEVELOPMENT OF TIME

When analysing the many deep changes in the New Guinean language, Bosavi Kaluli, brought about by the action of fundamentalist Christian missionaries, Schieffelin (2002) emphasises the dramatic modification of the concept of time and its forms of expression in the new context of a previously practically unknown type of speech: authoritative monologue, as used by preachers, teachers, etc (both Australian and converted and trained aboriginal). As she writes (page S6),

> These new [monologic] genres [i.e., sermon and lesson] aimed at shifting Bosavi people away from their indigenous time-place orientation to a fundamentalist Christian sense of time –one with no need for a Bosavi past, a present charged with change, and a future that depended on choices made in the present.

It was perhaps a need similar to that instilled into the Kaluli what lead to the complete restructuring of the tense systems in the Germanic languages, but also in so many other European languages: for a number of reasons (christianisation may be just one of them), the need arouse to be able to speak

[4] The time that has been shown to be enough for a pidgin to change into a creole (Voorhoeve, 1983).

about the passage of time, especially in relation to the present, which was now seen as some kind of 'final stage' to which everything previous has led, and which determines the future. This is the new philosophy of history that develops in the Middle Ages and extends its influence practically everywhere. And it is in clear opposition to a basically cyclic view of time, as in so many European pre-Christian mythologies.

Let us first concentrate on the Germanic languages. Their expression of time was relatively simple and not very precise, the basic distinction being one between an action seen as non-actual, *vs*. an actual process; the so-called past tense showed that the process involved was not actual: it was not directly observable nor in any way related to the present. On the other hand, the so-called Present, sometimes (better) Non-Past introduced the process as directly linked to the time of speech, whether in terms of time proper (something happening in the general temporal space of the present) or in its relation to the present moment (as in the extremely frequently occurring 'historical present' as used, e.g., in the Icelandic sagas): there it serves a clear function of profiling.

This system changed dramatically and new, very precise forms of marking the time of the event and its relation to the present were developed: systematically, by means of the use of auxiliary verbs, mainly those glossed as 'to have' and 'to be'. Just as in the Romance languages (where they also are a new development on the base of a rather different Low Latin system) and even in Greek (where there also exist perfect tenses built with the verb *echō*).

In the history of the particular languages, say the history of English, explanations for this extremely important change are usually found in internal developments, sometimes including the possible effects of language contact. But it is striking that practically the same development occurs practically everywhere at practically the same time. And that nothing similar happens anywhere else.

A similar development is identifiable in some modern Celtic languages: Irish *tá an dinnéar ite ag Seán* 'John has eaten dinner' has the auxiliary (*tá*) and a past participle; the use of the preposition *ag* 'at' points to the identity of this auxiliary, which otherwise means 'to be' with the verb of possession,

as 'John has it' is expressed as *tá sé ag Seán*. The Welsh construction is different: *Yr wyf i wedi clywed y gwcw* 'I have heard the cuckoo', has to be seen in the context of its periphrastic form of verb inflection, and the Present tense equivalent to the above sentence just changes the auxiliary: *Yr wyf i yn clywed y gwcw*: there was no free slot where a 'perfect tense' in this new sense and with this new form could fit.

In the Baltic, Latvian has a compound perfect conjugation formed with the verb *būt* 'to be' and the past active participle, as in *es esmu strādājis* (fem. *es esmu stradājusi*), 'I have worked'. Serbo-Croat uses a form that is quite similar to that of Latvian: *ja sam pevao* (fem. *ja sam pevala*) 'I sung/I have sung', with the verb 'to be' (as in Latvian and Modern Irish, there is no verb of possession proper) plus the active past participle; also in Old Russian. On the other hand, the Romance language, Romanian uses (phonetically reduced forms of) the verb *a avea* 'to have' with the past participle: *(eu) am spus* 'I have said'; similarly in Modern Greek: *écho chásei* 'I have lost', with the verb 'to have' and a form that is identical with the 3rd person sg of the indefinite. It was a new development, as the koiné still used the classical forms with endings and reduplication and no compound tense. But other languages of the area, such as Albanese, lack such compound tenses. In the far North, Finnish also has compound tenses with the verb *ole-* 'to have' and the past participle active of the verb: *olen saanut* 'I have received' and similarly in Saami: *sån læ boattán* 'he has come'.

As for the Indo-European languages of India, some of them at least also show a superficially similar construction: cf. Punjabi *ó bár gya e* 'he has gone out' with the auxiliary (*e*) and the past participle of the verb (*bár gya*). However, as the conjugation is basically carried out by means of auxiliaries (as in Welsh), this 'perfect tense' construction occupies in the grammatical structures of the language a position that is quite different from that of the geographically European languages.

Why such perfect tense forms in languages of different types and genetic affiliation? We might think that it may be some kind of (semi-) universal tendency which can appear here and there depending on basically internal features and conditions of the individual languages; apart from being the development of earlier forms, for instance a generalisation of the Latin

compound tenses to serve new functions whose original markers had been lost.

Interestingly, they are practically limited to the European area, although in some neighbouring languages something similar –but not quite identical– constructions may appear. Thus, Arabic has a kind of pluperfect tense, in Modern written Arabic and especially the dialects: Egyptian Arabic *kaan 'amal* 'he had done', and similarly in Maltese, or Moroccan Arabic; but it is not a real equivalent of the Western European perfect, but a specialised relative tense pointing to the completedness of a process before some past point of reference. The perfect tense as such (*he hecho*, *I have done*, etc) is expressed with the Arabic simple perfective: *'amal* 'he worked/did/made'.

In the much older, but related language, Middle Egyptian, there was nothing comparable with the European perfect, although constructions can be found which are –semantically, not formally– similar to the Arabic 'pluperfect'. These forms, however, are best analysed as serial constructions, of a type similar to what is found in a language not too distantly related to the Semitic languages, Hausa: in spite of the English gloss, *ya riga ya tafi* 'he has (already) gone' is simply two verbs: 'he did/preceded he went'. And the perfect tense with *to be/to have* plus a participle –or anything understandable and describable in similar terms– will not be found anywhere else further South… or further East.

This common development involves grammaticalisation and reanalysis of existing forms which adopt very similar forms a bit everywhere, but not quite exactly the same. A bit different is the following change, which may be seen to arise as a response to a new communicative need.

MARKING SOCIAL DISTANCE

In chronological coincidence with the development of Feudalism –and its cultural influence–, but in a process which will take several centuries to be completed, changes in the forms of address are observed. They are widespread and also affect the vocabulary, but here I shall limit my comments to the changes in the second person pronouns.

In the Gmc languages (and Latin, later Romance, Slavonic, Finnic, etc.), the original system was a simple singular versus a simple plural, as in Old English:

þú – gé

The common change implies everywhere the creation of honorific pronouns and brings about a number of restrictions –of a social nature– on the use of the non-honorific, singular pronouns.

Where do the new honorific forms come from? There appear to be the following main possibilities: (a) the plural pronoun used with a singular referent; (b) some third person pronoun (reflecting an honorific, non-pronominal, form of address), as in obsolete German *Er*[5] and Italian *Lei*; later, (c) the creation of a special pronoun, as Spanish *Usted*.

As their frequency of use renders the originally highly honorific pronouns less and less meaningful, new forms are developed to keep honorific treatment at the desired level. Whereas the first part of the change, i.e. the marking of social distance, is basically pan-European, this new development is language-specific, and depends heavily on the characteristics of the corresponding pronominal system, but also on other considerations. Thus, while Spanish develops a special form, *Usted*, as the grammaticalisation of a more complex, nominal form *Vuestra Merced*, Icelandic opts for a rather infrequent solution: the originally dual pronoun comes to serve the function of the non-honorific pronoun: *þið*[6] whereas the originally plural form *þér* specialises as the honorific form of address. Interestingly, the same happens in the first person: the Icelandic equivalent of the Latin honorific/majestatic *nos* is again the old plural: *vér*, whereas the old dual, *við*, is now used as the 'general-purpose' plural form.

In other languages, a tendency develops that prefers to avoid the use of a personal pronoun whenever an honorific form of address has to be chosen; some other kind of term is then preferred, for instance a title, the name of a profession, etc., together with the elliptic use of direct, pronominal address:

[5] Which is seen as a form intermediate between *Sie* and *Du* (Wahrig, s.v.)

[6] From older *it*, with incorporation of the verbal 2nd person pl ending *–ð*, cf. Swedish *ni*.

until quite recently, in High Swedish the use of the honorific pronoun *ni* was not deemed sufficiently elegant in less formal situations, and a title was used instead; but the use of a third person singular pronoun, which could have served as the shortest form of reference when using titles, was strictly taboo. One could (and should) address an engineer as (*Herr) Ingeniör*, also in the definite form with postposed article, *Ingeniören*, but no *hann* ('he') was acceptable, so that you have to repeat the title as often as needed. A similar form of treatment is also possible in formal situations in the Spanish of many Latin-American countries.

The geographic scope of this development is quite significant, especially the use of the plural as the polite or honorific form with a singular referent: it appears everywhere in Western Europe: in all the Germanic as well as the Romance languages (including the peculiar Romanian form *dumneavoastră*, literally 'your (pl) lordship', now used as a pronoun), the Slavonic languages (cf. Russian *vy*), or Greek; but also in an isolated language like Basque is found the distinction between the originally plural *zu*, now slightly honorific, and the singular *hi*, used only as a very familiar form of address. The situation varies in Celtic: whereas non such distinction was available in either Old or Modern Irish, it is current in Modern Welsh, were *ti* is the old singular, now used as the singular, non-polite form, while the old plural, *chwi*, in addition to its traditional use, is also employed as the singular polite form.

Farther away, the distinction is not found in Finnish but is current in Turkish (polite *siz*, pl/sg, versus intimate sg *sen*), but also in Iranian (*shomâ* is both sg and pl, just like English 'you') and Arabic (where the plural *antum* (masc.) / *antunna* (fem.) can be used as a polite form, instead of the usual *anta* (masc.) / *anti* (fem.)). Interestingly, in the Indian subcontinent the same process takes place: in Punjabi, for instance, *tung* is singular, intimate, whereas the plural *twsing* is also used with a singular referent, as the polite form. As for Urdu, a triple distinction exists, reaching from the marked, very intimate pronoun *tu*, through *twm*, a general-purpose polite form, to the honorific and formal *ap*; *twm* is a plural pronoun whereas *ap* is of nominal original.

In most of these languages, the development is fairly recent, beginning in the Late Middle Ages and continuing into the Modern period.

In this way, we have a change affecting practically the whole of Europe (plus some neighbouring areas where similar social conditions prevailed). My point is that the individual developments are best understood as particular manifestations of a single, common change (not as a number of coincidental, but independent changes), because:

It happens at about the same time in all these languages (but it can affect other languages later, as a result of later *linguistic* diffusion from neighbouring or culture languages, etc.)

It is related to similar social conditions which lead to the need to 'do something' in order to keep the social relations and distinctions clearly distinct. This (linguistic) process is obviously related to many other changes, both social (ranging from laws to clothing and social habits of many kinds, etc.) and linguistic, as the development of a wide array of possible –but socially driven– forms of address: titles, etc.

The particular forms that the change can take in the different areas and their corresponding languages depend on the particular conditions reigning in that area (partially irrespective of whether there is one language or more, and their mutual relations and characteristics). As well as on the linguistic features of every individual language (witness the developments in Icelandic, Spanish, German, or Italian).

The common European change creates new pronominal systems in the individual areas and languages which then can become fully regularised although in most cases a disruptive factor will generally induce new changes: the use of the plural pronoun as an honorific singular or plural and as a non-honorific (neutral?) plural (as in English *you*, French *vous*, etc.), or the blurring of other distinctions (Italian *lei* is both the singular honorific 2nd person and the feminine singular 3rd person pronoun, while German *Sie* is both honorific plural, 3rd person plural, and 3rd person singular, etc.) can lead to new changes in order to reinstate the plural-singular distinction, but this will basically depend on the particular conditions of each language. Thus, whereas the sg/pl distinction is lost in English in the 2nd person, a rather uncomfortable situation which leads to new formations as *you guys* (nowadays a part of spoken standard American), *y'all*, *youse* and the like, the coincidence of the 2nd plural honorific *Sie* and the singular feminine third

person *sie* in German can only very seldom lead to dangerous cases of ambiguity. Similarly, changes in the social conditions can lead to the loss of the honorific-non honorific distinction, as has generally happened in the Nordic languages, especially Icelandic, where the honorific singular/plural form *þér* is nowadays of extremely rare occurrence, in a development which runs in the opposite direction as the English generalisation of *you*.

Needless to say, this is no 'universal tendency': it is indeed difficult to find languages outside this area –and that period– where something similar took place. There does exist a universal tendency to mark politeness in some personal pronouns,[7] but the forms that such pronouns (or their equivalents in verbal forms, etc.) can adopt have nothing to do with this European change, which could be summed up as follows: A RESPECTED PERSON HAS TO BE ADDRESSED AS IF (S)HE WERE A GROUP (may be because reference is made, not to the individual, but to the social group s/he belongs to).

We have thus a change which meets all the conditions of 'a single' linguistic change; that is, it is just as unitary when seen at the level of a single language, say English, German, or Icelandic, or at that of a group of genetically related languages (the Romance languages) or even a set of not so closely related, but geographically linked languages (German and Italian, with the use of a third person singular pronoun: viz. *lei – Er*); there is also the influence of language contact, especially through the predominance of Latin, then French, in the Middle Ages: but the changes cannot be explained in terms of French, whose influence on Turkish was, to say the least, rather meagre.

But at the same time it cannot be said that the change as a whole is a language-specific change that was then diffused, as in a classical Wave Model: a North-French development, for instance, expanding in all directions. This single point of origin can exist, of course, but more in a political than a linguistic sense: as the centre of expansion of a number of *habitus* (Bourdieu's term), i.e., a number of socially preferred, individually entrenched or embodied forms which lead everybody's behaviour associated with the social conditions prevailing under feudalism.

[7] As in the Chinese opposition *ní – nín*, where the second form is polite and honorific.

On the other hand, those languages which lacked (and in some cases, still lack) this development can be explained, perhaps, in terms of their social isolation, being languages not used by those social groups where differentiation had to be made explicit; or geographical isolation; or both (as, say, in Saami).

MARKING THINGS AS CLEARLY AS POSSIBLE

One of the consequences of the development of a written form of language is that the communication partners loose the possibility of feedback. Writers have to make their message as clear as possible in order to avoid misunderstandings. To do this, they can use the model of a number of (apparently) extremely well codified written languages with extremely high prestige: depending on the part of the old Roman Empire, Latin or Greek. Both had a number of common features, derived mainly from their long-established status as written languages (that is, as a *monologic form of language*); among them, the very precise ways of expression of, for instance, semantic intersentential relations. In other words, text markers, and most significantly, coordinating and subordinating conjunctions.

This development is also the consequence of a well-known communicative need: argumentative texts develop in the written languages of the period; and that implies longer sentences, many more and more precise forms of relation, etc. All in all, the writer –as opposed to the dialogical speaker, who does not feel such a pressing need; but also the monological speaker, for instance in sermons etc.– has to mark in his text many elements which otherwise were left over for the communication partner to fill in.

We know that in this respect the extreme development of subordination, also in the Germanic languages, which begins in the Low Middle Ages, as well as the creation of a well-defined, functionally clear set of conjunctions, are processes directly linked to the written language. Suffice it to remember the difference in the construction of relative clauses in spoken and written English.

Again, more or less at about the same time, significantly common developments are visible in the European languages in this respect. It is clearly a matter of every language area and of every individual language,

trying to create the now necessary markers of intersentential relations, a piece of information that was previously left over to the reader's pragmatic knowledge.

The same process takes place all over Western Europe: new forms of subordination are investigated in the different written languages until a more or less stable system is achieved –in the early Modern Age. Remember that there was the idea around, in centuries fortunately past, that saw subordination as a mark of cultivated language, as against coordination and similar processes that were deemed typical of the spoken genres, that is, of the non-developed, non-normative, non-cultivated forms of language. And we know that the types of conjunctional subordination that are a characteristic feature of the European Languages may be a rarity, something basically limited to the written forms of language and the monologic genres based on it (as opposed to 'free dialogue'). This development is not only observable in the Germanic languages, as it appears again and again from Greece to Portugal, from Finland to Iceland, but also in the Slavic languages: a period can be witnessed when speakers –sorry: writers– are trying to create the by then necessary set of conjunctional and textual markers. As for English, remember the proliferation of conjunctions (same in Dutch, German…) and forms of subordination as opposed to the quite different system of textual markers in Old English.

Again a generalised change, that (1) happens at about the same time in the different languages, (2) cuts across the borders of the individual languages and genetic groups and is directly linked to a set of social and cultural conditions, prevalent throughout Europe (3) adopts specific forms according to the peculiarities of the individual languages and groups, and (4) has a subsequent history that depends on a number of internal circumstances.

WHO DUNNIT?

Another change, much more limited in scope, seems to have affected mainly the Germanic languages and those which, like French, lied within their area of influence; the Baltic, Slavonic, or Finnic languages, as also the Southern Romance languages, are not affected: this is a general tendency which could be defined –provisionally– as 'specifying the agent', which is

articulated in two changes: (1) the presence of an explicit subject gradually becomes obligatory; (2) the 'impersonal' constructions change into personal forms of expression. Old French, Middle Dutch, and Middle High German, to mention only a few significant examples, saw a gradual increase in the frequency of the expressed subjects from the twelfth or thirteenth century onwards. Similar changes can be observed in the other Germanic languages of the period, with the partial exception of Icelandic (and Faroese).

Similarly, we witness the gradual diminution of the large number of impersonal constructions, ranging from atmospheric verbs to 'real' impersonals, that is, processes without a (known or possible) agent/responsible entity, and also those verbs whose human participant is a goal or an experiencer (as in OE *me hungrode, me þyncþ*, Icelandic *mig dreymdi, mér þótti*). This development seems to be basically limited to the areas surrounding the North Sea, from France to Norway and back to England, and, as stated above, it is perhaps an internal development in Germanic which also affects French (through contact?). Icelandic, however, is essentially free from either process, so that even in the contemporary language the frequency of the explicit subject is much less than in any other Germanic language, and the same types of impersonal construction (plus some new, additional ones) are still found nowadays. A central area around the coasts of the Southern North Sea seems to be the axis for this development, whose social or cultural rationale escapes us for the moment.

THE ARTICLE

The definite article may seem to 'have been there since the beginning', but we know it is a fairly new development all over Europe. It appears in all the languages that belong to the following families: Germanic, Romance, Greek, Celtic, Basque. Outside Europe proper, Hebrew, Arabic and all its dialects also use the definite article, but they have had it since much earlier than the Western European languages. Some of the Slavonian languages of the Balcans, as Bulgarian, have also developed definite articles, as opposed to its lack in the rest of the group.

In all the cases –except Greek– the article is a new formation, as shown by the differences inside the families; not only the forms themselves, but the

type of construction: whereas in most of these languages the definite article is a (relatively) free morpheme preceding the noun, in the Nordic group it takes the form of a suffix… with the exception of the Western Jutland dialects of Danish, which follow the model of Low German (Saxon): [æ man'] versus Standard *manden* [man'en] (Ringgaard 1973). It is also a suffix in the Slavonic languages Bulgarian and Macedonian, as well as in the Romance language, Romanian.

In the geographical (and in great part, politically and culturally, too) East, the definite article is conspicuously absent: say in Turkish or the Indo-Iranian languages, including Modern Persian, but also in the Caucasus (Georgian or Chechen-Ingush, to mention only two). The definite article looks like a mainly Western-European feature with the solitary intrusion towards the South-East of Hungarian (as opposed to the other Fino-Ugric languages of Europe) and most members of the Balkanic *Sprachbund*, where the only Slavonian languages with a definite article are found (Slovenian seems to be in the process of acquiring a fully grammaticalised one, too); and quite interestingly, one of the three areas where the article takes the form of a nominal suffix: the extremes, i.e. Germanic Scandinavia, the Balkans –with the exception of Greek– and the South-West, i.e., Basque.

CONCLUSION

Many more common changes could be mentioned, including some more that are also directly related to the Middle Ages. Changes that go from general issues of language use to the development and organisation of new text genres or types, to matters of phonology, vocabulary, or syntax, but also morphology. In fact, most of Western Europe seems to function –apparently since the very beginning, quite clearly from the Low Middle Ages, obviously from the 17th and 18th centuries– as a linguistic *mesh* were the genetic links are just one factor.

We would not like to say that a certain change affecting, say, Middle English, is just a number of independent changes in the different dialects, which happen to coincide. We look at the changes the other way round: the dialects 'somehow' represent different realisations of the same change, or tendency. Of course, the realisation of the changes takes place independently,

but we still talk about the Great English Vowel Shift as a single, although extremely complex, process This procedure is much more illuminating than the fragmentation in a never-ending number of apparently independent, though coincidental, changes: analysing the South-East English Vowel Shift, then the North-West English Vowel Shift, and so on and so forth. From this 'supradialectal level' which more frequently than not corresponds with that of the national language (whether real, historic, or prospective) we can jump to the genetic group (say, the common developments in the Germanic languages during the Middle Ages); but we do it only exceedingly seldom, except for the purpose of reconstruction. We then do an immense jump to the purely universal tendencies, and can see a certain change (for instance the development of the definite article) as the result of a particular process of grammaticalisation involving reanalysis in the context of the lack of deictic force of some demonstratives.

Of course, all this is quite correct. But there are questions that cannot be adequately solved at any of those levels: why does there suddenly arise the apparent need to express clearly in communication 'whatever may be expressed' with the definite article? And why do the different languages make different options to achieve the same end? And why does the same change occur within more or less tightly related genetic groups, but also among completely unrelated languages which, however, share a geography, and many elements of the cultural and social life?

It can be quite illuminating to throw a fresh look at the history of the (national) languages at a new level: that of the Great European Linguistic Mesh.

Enrique Bernárdez

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

REFERENCES

Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 2003: Mechanisms of Change in Areal Diffusion: New Morphology and Language Contact. *Journal of Linguistics* 39: 1-29.

Alvarado, Salustio 1992: *Gramática histórica de la lengua rusa*. Don Libro, Madrid.

Bailey, T. Grahame 1950: *Urdu*. Ed. J.R. Firth & A.H. Harley. The English Universities Press, London.

Bakker, Peter 2003: Review of Fortescue 1998. *Linguistic Typology* 7-1: 151-156.

Bammesberger, Alfred 1982: *A Handbook of Irish*. Carl Winter, Heidelberg.

Berg, B. van den 1971: *Inleiding tot de middelnederlandse syntaxis*: Wolters-Noordhoff, Groningen.

Bergsland, K. 1961: *Samisk grammatikk*. Kirke-og Undervisnings-departementet, Oslo.

Bernárdez, Enrique 2004: *¿Qué son las lenguas?* Alianza, Madrid.

Bowen, John T. & T.J. Rhys Jones 1960: *Welsh*. The English Universities Press, London.

Buch, A. de 1952: *Grammaire élémentaire du moyen égyptien*. Brill, Leiden.

Budiņa Lazdiņa, Terēza 1966: *Latvian*. The English Universities Press, London.

Dixon, R.M.W. 1997: *The Rise and Fall of Languages*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Fortescue, Michael 1998: *Language Relations Across the Bering Strait: Reappraising the Archaeological and Linguistic Evidence*. Cassel, London & New York.

Herrero Muñoz-Cobo, Bárbara 1998: *Gramática de árabe marroquí para hispano-hablantes*. Universidad de Almería, Almería.

Hopper, Paul J. 1975: *The Syntax of the Simple Sentence in Proto-Germanic*. Mouton, The Hague.

Howell, R.B. 1991: *Old English Breaking and its Germanic Analogues*. Niemeyer, Tübingen.

Javarek, Vera & Miroslava Sudjić 1963: *Serbo-Croat*. Teach Yourself Books, London.

Jiménez Zamudio, Rafael 1998: *Gramática de la lengua sumeria*. Ediciones Clásicas, Madrid.

Keller, Rudi 1990: *Sprachwandel. Von der unsichtbaren Hand in der Sprache*. Francke, Tübingen.

Kraft, Charles H. & A.H.M. Kirk-Greene 1973: *Hausa*. Teach Yourself Books, London.

Lecomte, Gérard 1968: *Grammaire de l'arabe*. P.U.F., Paris .

Lehmann, R.P.M. & W.P. Lehmann 1975: *An Introduction to Old Irish*. MLA, New York**.**

Lewis, G.L. 1953: *Turkish*. Teach Yourself Books, London.

Mitchell, T.F. 1962: *Colloquial Arabic. The Living Language of Egypt*. Teach Yourself Books, London.

Munske, Horst Haider 1995: Ist eine europäische Sprachgeschitsschreibung möglich? In Andreas Gardt, Klaus J. Mattheier & Oskar Reichmann, eds. *Sprachgeschichte des Neuhochdeutschen*. Niemeyer, Tübingen. 399-411.

Raynaud de Lage, Guy 1975: *Introduction à l'ancien français*. SEDES, Paris.

Ringgaard, K. 1973: *Danske dialekter*. Akademisk Forlag, København.

Sanz Ledesma, Manuel 1996: *El albanés*. Ediciones Clásicas, Madrid.

Schackle, C. 1972: *Punjabi*. Teach Yourself Books, London.

Schieffelin, Bambi B. 2002: Marking Time. The Dichotomizing Discourse of Multiple Temporalities. *Current Anthropology* 43, *Supplement*: 5-17.

Ştefănescu-Drăgăneşti, Virgiliu & Martin Murrell 1970: *Romanian*. Teach Yourself Books, London.

Tejada, Paloma 1999: *El cambio lingüístico*. Alianza, Madrid.

Thackston, W.M. 1994. *An Introduction to Koranic and Classical Arabic*. IBEX, Bethesda, MD.

Vincenot, Claude 1975: *Essai de grammaire slovène*. Mladinska kniga, Ljubljana.

Voorhoeve, Jan 1983: De orsprong van het Surinaams. In E. Charry, G. Koefoed, P. Muysken eds. *De talen van Suriname*. Coutinho, Muiderberg.

Wahrig, Gerhard 1973: *Deutsches Wörterbuch*. Bertelsmann, Berlin.

Weijnen, A.A 1971: *Schets van de geschiedenis van de nederlandse syntaxis*. Van Gorcum, Prakke & Prakke, Assen.

Whitney, Arthur H. 1956: *Finnish*. Teach Yourself Books, London.

Zubiri, Ilari 1994: *Gramática didáctica del euskera*. Didaktiker, Bilbo.

Zurdo, Mª I. Teresa 2002: Lecture on the History of the German Language, delivered at the Department of English, Universidad Complutense, Madrid.

* † *