

Cristiana Papahagi
Linguistic Change : Causes and Context
– Habilitation Thesis –

A. Abstract

After my admission as a foreign student to the prestigious École Normale Supérieure and the University of Paris III Sorbonne Nouvelle, my career focused on research and teaching in the field of French linguistics and, more broadly, Romance languages. In parallel with my PhD research on the semantics of motion prepositions in typological and historical perspective, I gave at the University Charles-de-Gaulle Lille 3 courses in syntax and semantics of the verb and linguistics for the didactics of French as a foreign language.

After obtaining my doctorate in 2005, I was invited to participate in several international research projects (Lyon 2/CNRS and Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics), centered on the linguistic expression of space from a typological perspective; I am proud to have been able to include and represent my mother tongue in research of such scope. I also gained expertise in field surveys and in the processing of multilingual corpora, and experience in working with international teams.

After my return to Romania and the beginning of my teaching activity at the Faculty of Letters of Cluj (Department of French language), my research continued on avenues discovered during the thesis and insufficiently explored at the time, starting by the phenomenon of grammaticalisation, widely discussed at the time in international research. Confronted with the rather rigid universal model elaborated by the functional typology, I tried to amend it in the light of the facts that I discovered in the Romance languages. After having thus explored a case of grammaticalisation by contact, then historical changes that led to competitions or overlaps, or even evolutions radically contradicting the model of grammaticalisation, I proposed alternative interpretations for these complex changes that take place at the interface between lexicon and grammar. I also analyzed the largely ignored phenomenon of the disappearance of grammatical

instruments, based on the case of the Romanian infinitive and the aspectual periphrases of French.

These studies were dealing with historical changes at the level of the morphosyntactic and semantic system of languages; however, my analyses have shown in each of these cases influences from outside the system: massive and unconscious influences, such as those induced by contact, but also influences due to conscious interventions on the linguistic material.

I have thus been led, in recent years, to explore various aspects at the interface between the linguistic “system” and the speakers. My main object of study being the standard French language, with its unanimously recognized "exceptional" profile, I put the study of external factors under the sign of the macro-change called standardisation (modeled within a very recent framework, historical sociolinguistics). I analyzed in this perspective the ideologies of the standard language (with a parallel in the Romanian language), the evolution of the glossonym, which reflects the situation of the standard in the diasystem, the ways of elaborating the material in order to adapt it to the function (during codification, but also in prestige texts), with the aim of obtaining, ideally, a holistic vision on linguistic change itself.

My research has been published in volumes and prestigious journals and has had an impact, as evidenced by the numerous international mentions, often in the works of recognized specialists. This research has also served me in my philological translation activities. But, much more important for me, all these studies, which are part of the most recent directions of international research, have been reflected in my teaching activity, in the courses that I have created and that I assume as part of the BA program of French language (grammar of spoken French, semantics of grammar, and especially the history of the French language) and at master's level (linguistic typology and Romance intercomprehension). I am happy to have been able to instill a passion for linguistics in students who have pursued these fields or approaches in their own research.

As part of the doctoral school, I will continue research under the dual approach of historical sociolinguistics and diachronic typology. I intend to publish the second part of the (internal and external) history of the French language, as well as a thematic glossary of historical linguistics, in Romanian, which will include all aspects of historical change and all the methods or interpretations proposed in linguistics for change. I will also start a research project aiming at “degrammaticalization” – a typologically improbable change,

but present in all modern Romance languages, and I will write a second philological edition-translation of medieval French literature (the Roman de Renart).

These are also the fields in which I will direct the research of my future PhD students: linguistic ideologies and policies in France and in French-speaking countries; grammatical aspects of diamesic variation; grammatical changes in French; the semantics of grammatical instruments in diachronic typological perspective.