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SLAVIC-ROMANCE CONTACT IN THE DANUBIAN AREA  
(from the diachronic point of view)

I. The aim of this paper is to discuss some of the aspects of a larger project concerning the forms of Latin and the Romance languages spoken in the Eastern Alps and on the Pannonian plains during Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.

The Eastern Alps and the Pannonian plain are very different geographic environments, and although they share important common points as a historical region, they cannot be studied as a unit. However, these regions are interesting in terms of the diachronic linguistics of European languages, as they represent the main point of geographic connection between Southeastern Europe, Central Europe, and the Italian peninsula. If on the one hand the frequent contact and exchange between the languages of the different local populations has affected the way people speak, on the other hand the points of contact between the various languages can be used to document and date the steps of their historical evolution.

As a symbol of the contact between these different parts of Europe, I have chosen the Danube River. It is in this sense that we should understand the definition of the Danubian Area as mentioned in the title.

II. In conducting research about the Slavic-Romance contact it is important, as with any case of language contact, to keep in mind the sociolinguistic situation which led to the different phenomena we are recording. Sociolinguistic issues have been included within the scope of Romance comparative studies since the work of Schuchardt (1866-68). In the end we can say that such issues determine the very definition of the discipline itself.

There exist many theories regarding the birth of the Romance languages. The most wide-spread theory states that common spoken Latin (Vulgar Latin) was the base of every language in the group. According to this theory, after the dissolution of the empire, Latin also spread apart, developing into a number of geographical dialects.

However, not all scholars acknowledge the end of the Empire as the starting point for the differentiation. For example, Křepinský wrote that a Vulgar Latin common to the entire empire never existed. According to his argument, beginning with the moment of Roman conquest, every province developed its own language, based on Latin but at the same time incorporating elements of the local languages (Křepinský 1930:50, 1958:1). He demonstrated this using the help of a relative chronology of phonetic changes in the different regions.

The studies of de Dardel occupy a similar position. According to de Dardel's thesis, the provincial population did not have the chance to learn proper Latin, but were able to speak a kind of pidgin based on Latin. After several generations, this then evolved into a Creole (de Dardel 1994). According to de Dardel's thesis, this is the best way to explain the typological changes of the Romance languages. He also coined the French name for this Latin Creole: 'Protoroman'.

The main difference between Křepinský and de Dardel lies in the fact that the first stresses the role of individual substrata, and the second instead assumes that in terms of the Protoroman there were only a few geographic variants which were somehow related. In terms of chronology, de Dardel's proposal is that any time after the first century AD is within the scope of Romance studies, not only the time period following the fall of the Roman Empire. Following Křepinský, a Romance language would arise at the moment when the native population attempted to speak the language of the Roman conquerors,

i.e. every province would have a different starting point. Taking into account the arguments of both scholars, my aim will be to consider the birth of those languages in the general context of the process of 'romanization'.

### III.1. At what point does it make sense to speak about a Slavic-Romanian contact?

As I have written elsewhere (Cadorini 1996) we cannot imagine that the relationship between Rome and a conquered country started only during the actual occupation. We must first take into account at least the possibility of trade. An interesting theoretical model for this is offered by archaeology. From this point of view, we know that it is possible to find products coming from the territory of the Empire in a given area dating from even before the time of Roman occupation. There are situations where the Roman influence is so strong that we can use the term 'Roman Age' for an archaeological period of a certain region even though the area in question had never been ruled by Rome, as is the case with Bohemia and a large part of Germany.

This means that the Romans would first export their civilization, and then attempt to extend also their political influence. After every new geographical enlargement of the Empire, this cycle would then begin anew beyond the new border.

### III.2. Why then should linguistic romanization not proceed in the same way as technological romanization?

If this were the case, we may assume that products would cross borders along with their names, not only in the case of products new to that culture, but also for known merchandise, due to the higher level of prestige attached to the Latin name. In looking for an analogous situation, it is interesting to point out that the communication needs of trade-related activities seem to constitute the oldest and most common core of all Creole languages in the former colonies of European countries. In fact, all of those languages contain some Portuguese elements, including the Creole spoken in areas outside the sphere of Portuguese influence. This may be explained by the fact that people deported from Africa in their common linguistic background had at least some elements of the means of communication commonly employed on the Atlantic shore with (perhaps not only) Portuguese traders (Goodman 1993).

This line of reasoning concurs with the assumptions of Czekanowski (1927:204-206), who wanted to explain Meillet's list of the Latinisms found in the common Slavic (Meillet 1902:179-187) in terms of the trade contacts between Central Europe and the territory of the Empire. In this context, he furthermore recalls the diffusion of Arabic culture along with the Swahili language as an effect of trade along the East African coast.

III.3. The idea that the first Slavic-Romanian contacts can be traced back to the Roman era is consistent with our theoretical framework. On the one hand, we may assume that any Latin spoken outside Latium since the recorded era is a matter of Romance studies, and on the other we must take into account that at the time of the fall of the Empire, the Slavs were not very far from its borders. With this fact in mind, we can presume that they were about to enter the first phase of romanization.

IV.1. It is certain that such contact with the romanized local population became more relevant after the migration of Slavs to formerly Roman provinces, namely Dacia, Moesia, Dalmatia, Pannonia and Noricum. For this reason, the signs of this meeting which we find in the Slavic languages spoken in those areas today are important sources for the reconstruction of the local Romance languages. Apart from Romanian, these have

all disappeared, although Dalmatian survived on the island of Krk until the end of the nineteenth century.

Let us look at just one example: the etymology of the Slovenian word *mitza* [mitʃa]/[mitʒa] or 'table'. This must have its origin from the Latin ME:NSAM<sup>1</sup> - 'table'. However, it cannot derive from the Latin directly, and therefore must be a borrowing from a Romance language. In fact, within that word we can observe the consequences of two Romance characteristics: firstly, the change NS > /tʃ/; secondly, the pronunciation of the stressed /e/ in the pattern of the end /e/ + voiced consonant + vowel as a very closed [ɛ] (Ranovš 1936:40), or perhaps [ɪ].

Slovenians live today in the area of the former Pannonia, Noricum and Venetia et Histria, so the nearest native Romance languages in this case are represented by the neighbouring (and partly house-sharing) Friulian (i.e. Eastern Rhaeto-Romanic) to the West and by distant Romanian to the East. Both of the Romance characteristics under consideration are absent in Romanian, where we find the word *masa* [masa], 'table' < ME:NSAM. In Friulian, we can find both characteristics, but we do not find any spontaneous continuation of the Latin word; instead Friulian uses *table*, 'table' < TABULAM 'board'. Taking these elements into account, we may conclude on the basis of the Slovene material that the pattern ME:NSAM had a greater rate of occurrence when the Slavs settled in the Eastern Alps than today, continuing at least until the border of Venetia et Histria.

After a suitable comparison with other borrowings from Romance languages (e.g. place names), we could verify whether some features of the vocalic system in the Latin of Pannonia or Noricum conform to the evolution we find in the Friulian area.

IV.2. Somewhere along the Danube region exists an important border which is between the area where the lenition of Latin inter-vocalic consonants occurred and where it did not. Friulian is one of the languages belonging to the first area, while Romanian belongs to the second.

Šturm has already studied this question, on the basis of such borrowings present in Slovenian. With the help of borrowed place names, he established that the border between the two areas should run through Slovene territory (Šturm 1928:23). I do not agree with all the details of his reasoning. Most of all, I do not see a strong argument in favor of dividing the evolution of North Istria from that of Friuli: the case presented by Šturm (the Slovene *Koper* < CAPR-) does not take into account a Latin inter-vocalic position. In any case, it is very interesting to reflect the fact that the names where the lenition occurred correspond to localities found on the territory of Venetia et Histria and that the cases of conservation are found only in the former Pannonia.

Unfortunately, only one of Šturm's examples for Pannonia is certain: the Slovene *Logatec* < LONGATICUM (In fact Šturm put as the starting form LONGATICI, an hypothetical archaic locative, which is rather unnatural for a provincial area. Regarding the form LONGATICUM, the Slovene -c could instead be an effect of the third Slavic palatalization). Concerning Šturm's other two examples, the Slovene *Pruf* < POETOVIVUM might represent the consequence of an assimilation of *pd-* > *pr-*; while the river *Köper* < COLAPEM has the Italian name of *Colpo*, showing a syncope.

It is likely that in expanding such a comparison to the entire Danubian area, we could find more evidence towards the exact definition of the border between the two isoglossal areas. The results of such a comparison would also constitute a test for the traditional classification of the Romance languages (Cadorini 2001).

<sup>1</sup> I will follow the tradition of Romance philology and denote words from Vulgar Latin in capital letters; if they are nouns, the accusative form is given as default.

V.1. The borrowings from Romance into Slavic languages can also help to establish dialectal segmentation. For instance, Meillet found in dialectal differentiation the explanation for the evolution of the two words for 'Rome' and 'cross' in several Slavic languages (Meillet 1924:102; quoted by Bidwell 1961:120-121): Old Church Slavonic: *rima*, Czech: *řím*, *říč*; Polish: *Rzym*, *krzyż*; Russian: *r'im*. In fact, all of these cases seem to derive from a Common Slavic *i*, but here, looking to the back vowel in the root of the Latin originals ROMAM and CRUCEM, we should expect to find a Common Slavic *y*. This is why Meillet thought that these borrowings should involve a dialect where *i* and *y* coalesced earlier than observed elsewhere.

Bidwell (ibid.) assumes that this might be the western South Slavic dialect. He reminds us that the point of origin for the borrowing could not be Latin, and this fact is particularly evident in the word for cross, where we can observe two Romance characteristics affecting the last consonant. The first is the palatalization of the Latin nexus CE, the second is the inter-vocalic lenition mentioned above. Both characteristics are present in Friuli (but not in Dalmatia, if Bidwell meant the Adriatic coast; e.g. Krk's Romance *krink* 'cross').

V.ii. This hypothesis of a Friulian origin for the borrowing also matches the historical context, due to the missionary activity originating from Aquileia, the Metropolitan See for the Eastern Alps. However, the huge area of influence exerted by Aquileia – which was the main actor in terms of the region's Christianization, but also the starting point of its romanization – is also the reason why we cannot establish with any real precision where such a contact took place.

In fact, we know that the Romance populations were still living in Pannonia and Noricum after the fall of the Roman Empire. For Noricum we have evidence for their presence around Salzburg until the 9th century (Thiffl 1980:220). It is natural to assume that the language of these populations might somehow remind us of the usage where the process of romanization originated, i.e. Aquileia. This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the old Romance borrowing in Western Slavic, as the Czech *bazem* 'pheasant' and *varhany* 'organ (musical)' or their equivalent in neighboring languages (Cadornini 1996: 43-44). The fact that Western Slavs did not live on the territory of the former Roman Empire (except in a small part of Pannonia) is an argument in favor of the role of trade and other cross-border contacts in facilitating the process of borrowing between the two linguistic communities.

I hope that this review of the open field of research regarding the points of contact between the Slavic and Romance populations will help to increase the number of diachronic studies in this domain. At the same time, I hope that it will convince the reader that such contacts are in fact very old and concern an area larger than is traditionally assumed.

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#### Povzetek

I. V tem delu se ukvarjam s stiki med romanskimi in slovanskimi jeziki v vzhodnih Alpah in v Panonski nižini. II. Uporabljam teoriji Maxmilians Křepinského in Roberta de Dardela o mestanku romanskih jezikov. III. To predvsem pomeni, da vključujem v romansko obdobje že prve stike med Rimljani in prebivalstvom zasedenih dežel. Ker so se slednji začeli že pred osvojitvijo, na primer zaradi trgovine, vidimo možnost takih stikov že v starem veku. IV. Poleg najstarejših stikov so zanimivi podatki, ki jih lahko dobimo iz primerjave med slovanskimi jeziki, govornimi v krajih, kjer so se romanski jeziki izgnali, in bližnjina romanskega jezika, s furlanščino in romunščino. Šturm se je ukvarjal s krajecimi imeni romanskega izvora na Slovenskem in na ta način lahko določimo stare romanske izgoose, ki se potekajo po tem ozemlju. V. Te primerjave lahko postregajo tudi pri določanju slovanskih izlogov v obdobju pred pojavitv bogatin pisnih virov.

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