

Stability, Variation and Change of Word-Order Patterns over Time

STABILITY, VARIATION AND CHANGE IN WORD ORDER
SOME EVIDENCE FROM THE ROMANCE LANGUAGES

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0. *Introduction*

In this paper, on the basis of a brief analysis of the structures of some Romance languages, a few ideas are presented on the general subject of the relationship between stability, variation and change in WO patterns, and on some of the methodological and theoretical problems it raises.

1. *Criteria for determining stability, variation and change in WO across time*

A prerequisite to the study of the relationship between continuity and discontinuity in patterns of WO over time is the selection of a homogeneous class of structures (for example, the sentence and those constituents of it which bear GFs, the NP and its head and modifying constituents, etc.) and to examine their WO properties, according to a perspective which we shall call 'longitudinal'. The structure must be defined in such a way as to restrict the range of variations in the patterns arising as a result of its properties. Thus, as far as the sentence is concerned, it is necessary to distinguish structures with transitive V from those with intransitive V; at a more detailed level of analysis it is important to differentiate full and pronominal NPs, and so on. The structure thus determined constitutes the *unit of observation over time*.

A further requirement is the selection of a single language, or at most, a family of genetically related languages, according to a perspective which may be defined as 'microscopic'; this is oriented towards an examination of the properties of WO patterns which takes into account the *specific*, that is *historical, conditions* which may have brought them about.

'Longitudinal' and 'microscopic' approaches constitute methodological criteria different from classical approaches of typology. But traditional typological models have limited use in the diachronic domain, even though they may very often be useful, and in certain cases even indispensable,

especially when working on very remote periods in time. With this in mind, it may be appropriate to make a distinction between a typology which applies its tools directly to the study of historical development and a diachronic study which, with due care and attention, makes *supplementary* use of typological tools.

The longitudinal and microscopic approaches require comparison between the properties of the class of structures chosen and those of other classes of structures to be carried out secondarily. In other words, traditional typological correlations between parameters, such as order of main constituents and types of head-dependency, should follow and not precede the study of a given phenomenon in the temporal dimension.

The method just outlined is appropriate for a variety of reasons, some of which regard the very nature of the theoretical problem of stability, variation and change in order patterns. In fact, how to define these concepts and the way they relate to each other is a problem in itself. Here the assumption is made that variation may not necessarily bring about changes; on the contrary, it may well be related to 'stable' states over long time spans. This is true of both alternations in patterns of order and fluctuations in their frequency of occurrence (cf. § 2-3). A further assumption is that the integration of stability, variation and change into a unitary framework requires resorting to historical models of continuity and discontinuity.

Another reason for the choice of the longitudinal and microscopic approaches concerns aims of research. Typological models have been set up with very different objectives from those with which studies on stability, variation and change are concerned. The aim in setting up typological models of various types has always been the *classification* of languages and language families on the basis of certain parameters, while the aim of a study of continuity and discontinuity is the understanding of the possibilities in patterns of order, in that examination of possible alterations allows light to be thrown on the nature of the patterns themselves and of the structure with which they are associated; this is made possible by establishing the *conditions* and *restrictions* they are subject to and which may be verified over time spans of greater or lesser duration. In other words, the aim of such a study is the understanding of the *dynamics* within the structure over time.

There is a further difference between studies of continuity vs. discontinuity and most of the typological studies on diachronic development. The latter examine the development over time of correlations between patterns of order of different structures. Such correlations, drawn up on the basis of synchronic surveys carried out on a large scale (that is, of tens or hundreds of languages),

are both *too rigid* and *too general*. They multiply the variables involved and are at a level of abstraction which makes it difficult to ascertain the dynamics of the structure examined. The main interest in research carried out in this vein is the description and explanation of change in WO patterns in a given language, understood as change in a set of correlations between parameters, that is, as the change of a system. On the whole, this constitutes a synchronic view applied *sic et simpliciter* to the diachronic domain. The former, on the other hand, require specific initial modelling, in order to represent the concepts of 'stability', 'variation' and 'change' and their inter-relationships. They also require consideration of the kind of particular conditions that play a central role in the domain defined as 'history of language'.

The *time factor* also requires adequate modelling. On the methodological level, then, in the study of dynamics, procedures are preferred whereby individual structures are isolated in order to carry out broad analyses of the range of fluctuations in the patterns of order concerned.

Closely related to the first is a second reason. A study with the objectives defined above requires what may be called *dynamic models* (cf. Sornicola 1994, Sornicola forthcoming), for which an integrated analysis of a multiplicity of interacting textual, pragmatic and cultural factors is indispensable.

Finally, a not insignificant reason is that typological correlations are in themselves problematic. For example, it has been claimed in several independent accounts that it is not the basic order of constituents which determines constituent order at a lower hierarchical level. Furthermore, there are numerous diachronic studies in which the application of correlational generalizations gives inconsistent or circular results.

The unit of observation over time and the set of WO patterns which it may assume, according to the pragmatic and historical conditions of the texts in which they occur, constitute the *characteristic defined as flexibility of the structure*. Clearly much importance is given in this approach not only to dominant order with respect to basic order, but also to orders which are only minority or marginal.

Unlike some current approaches, where languages may be divided between those with pragmatic WO and those with syntactic WO, here it is assumed that there are no languages without flexibility of WO. If anything, languages differ from each other according to differing *maps of flexibility in individual structures*. This means that in each language the areas of flexibility vary in size and organization. Areas of flexibility are often, but not exclusively, connected to pragmatic functions (PF). The analysis of the flexibility of a given structure over time intervals of a sufficient length allows a better understanding of the

nature of WO diachronic processes. Note, however, that the length of such intervals is a problem in itself (cf. § 5).

In addition to the preceding criteria, there are others which are usual in any research of a historical nature; these are:

- precise choice of sources across time;
- attention to cultural specificity in the sources.

2. *Flexibility over time in transitive structures in the Romance languages*

Romance languages provide an interesting testing ground for the study of continuity and discontinuity of WO. The vast amount of documentation allows for a historically based examination of their characteristics of flexibility. Of course, the use of literary and documentary texts requires all the caution that sources written in the past demand. One hardly needs reminding of the continuous influence that medieval Latin and, later, classical Latin have had on texts written in Romance, and more generally European languages. Hilty's observations concerning the language of the Strasbourg Oaths, that "*die Zugrunde liegende Spontansprache schimmert nur in verhältnismässig wenigen Erscheinungen durch die Lateinische Schrifttradition hindurch*" (1966:228), could also apply to other Romance texts of successive centuries, although with certain differences. Awareness of the none too close correspondence between spontaneous phenomena and phenomena associated with the written language is particularly important with respect to WO patterns in sentential structures, since for many centuries WO was also significantly shaped by the classical and medieval rhetorical traditions (cf. Scaglione 1972).

To the extent that examination of historical documents makes such a claim possible, SVO is consistently the dominant order in medieval and modern prose texts (cf. Sornicola, Barbato, Cesarano & Puolato 1994; Sornicola forthcoming; Salvi 1996 has an interesting analysis of WO patterns of the diachrony of Romance languages with special emphasis on the syntax of pronouns). In contrast to what is often assumed, a greater freedom of constituent order in Italian and Spanish than in French is unsubstantiated for modern phases (cf. § 3), as well as for medieval phases, where the literary languages show a significant degree of homogeneity in WO patterns (cf. Sornicola, Barbato, Cesarano & Puolato 1994).

OVS and OSV types are minority orders with a higher frequency in the prose of medieval Romance texts. Nonetheless, they have a comparatively low frequency: the frequency of O in P1 (sentence first position) or in P2 (sentence second position) is below 15% in XIIIth and XIVth century texts. OVS order falls within the more general rule of S inversion when a constituent occupies

the pre-verbal position (cf. Foulet 1919:387ff.); the second, more rare, occurs almost always when S is a pronoun (cf. also Price 1961: 29, 43, 45 for Froissart). These orders have one or other of two possible functions: marking the orientation of the structure towards the left context (more rarely right: cf. Ruelle 1966) or marked focalization of a constituent. In the first case O is a completely or partially thematic element (or, alternatively, anticipatory), as may be seen from the fact that in the majority of cases the constituent which realizes such a function is an anaphoric demonstrative (cf. here, examples (1-5)):

- (1) "Hé! Douce terre pleine de toutes beneürtez et en qui mes esperis et ma vie remaint outrement, beneoite soies tu de la bouche de celui qu'en apele Jhesucrist...". *Itex paroles dist Lancelos* quant il parti del roiaume de Logres (MRA, §124, 1)
- (2) "...il li acreanta come rois que, ja plus tost la Pasque ne seroit passee, qu'il iroit a ost banie seur Lancelot et tant se traveilleroit... qu'il abatroit les fortereces de Banoïc et de Gaunes en tel maniere qu'il ne leroit en mur pierre seur autre. *Ceste promesse fist li rois* a monseigneur Gauvain (MRA, §128, 13-14)
- (3) Dont j'en parlay a deux, qui m'ont compté qui furent cinq qui, par bonne compaignie devisant des adventures de celle cave, tous d'un vouloir entreprendrent d'aler jusques es portes de metal qui jour et nuyt batent... Et *ceste chose avoient ilz entrepris*, comme jeunesse fait souventefois entreprendre les gens oyseux (PRS, 80-82, C)
- (4) ca pero non se mesauan nin se rascauan, nin dauan bozes, a todos semejaua quel quebraran por los coraçones, dando sospiros e llorando muy fuerte e poniendo las manos sobre los oïos. *E eso mesmo fazia el infante Roboan e toda la su gente* (Zifar, 390)
- (5) Li vecchi l'insegnaro: Ragunerai il popolo tuo, e con dolci parole dirai che tu li ami si come te medesimo e ch'elli sono la corona tua, e che, se tuo padre fu loro aspro, che tu sarai loro umile e benigno... *Queste parole l'insegnaro i savi vecchi del regno* (Novellino, VIII, 74)

Note that in (3) the pattern O + Aux + S + Past Part occurs, which is typical of VP structures with Aux + Past Part.

O in pre-verbal position is, although more rarely, an element introducing a TOPIC [+NEW] (cf. examples (6-7); for further examples see Ruelle 1966):

- (6) Pour ce que, quant venoit le vendredi, après la mienuyt, sa compaignie se levoit d'emprès lui et s'en aloit à la roïne, et toutes les autres de leans aussi. Et la estoient, en chambres et en autres lieux ad ce ordonnez, en estat de couleuvres et de serpens toutes ensemble; et ainsi estoient jusques après la mienuit du samedi, que chascune retournoit a sa compaignie; et l'endemain, sembloit estre plus belle que jamais n'avoit esté. Car elles jamais n'envieillissent, ne scevent que douleur est. *Des vestemens* ont il a leurs vuloir; de viandes est chascun servi a l'appetit de son cuer; *richesses* ont ilz a planté (PRS, 97, C, r. 6-8)

- (7) Si dirent les gens que c'estoit une voix de paradis de la Sibille. Mais, quant a moy, je n'en croy riens; ains croy que fussent mes chevaux qui au pié du mont estoient, combien qu'ilz fussent moult bas et loings de moy. Et *nulle autre chose* je ne vis né ne sçay, fors seulement ce que les gens du païs et de ladite ville m'en ont dit (PRS, 80, C, r. 4-5)

Examples in which O in pre-verbal position has a PF of marked FOCUS (sometimes contrastive) are:

- (8) Quant la nouvele fu expandue par la cité et l'en sot que li rois Artus fu ocis et tuit cil qui o lui estoient alé, *grant duel* firent et li povre et li riche por le roi Artu (MRA, § 136, r. 16-17)
- (9) E [el Cauallero Zifar] boluiose de rostro contra el señor de la hueste e puso la lança so el sobaco e dixo asy: "Cauallero defendetvos". "E quien eres tu", dixo el señor de la hueste, "que atanto te atreues?". "Çertas", dixo el Cauallero Zifar, "agora lo veredes". E finco las espuelas al cauallo e fuelo ferir, e diole vna grant lançada por el costado quel paso las guarniçiones, e metiose por el costado la lança bien dos palmos, e dio con el en tierra. La su gente commo yuan veniendo, yuan feriendo sobre el e trabajauanse mucho de lo poner en el cauallo. E entretanto el Cauallero Zifar tornose con su gente e pasaron el alcantariella en saluo. E *mas merçed* fizo Dios al cavallero Zifar e a su gente; quel fijo del señor de la hueste, quando vio que el padre era derribado, finco las espuelas al cauallo e fue ferir vn cauallero de los de la villa; peroque lo non enpesçio, e metiose en la espesura de la gente e presieronle, e asy lo leuaron preso a la villa (Zifar, 115)
- (10) io non so quello che de' vostri pensieri voi v'intendete di fare: *li miei* lasciai io dentro dalla porta della città (Decameron, I, Introd., 28, § 93)

In main clauses, the SOV type is highly marginal throughout the entire history of the Romance languages (as to French, cf. Foulet 1919:316-318; Brunot 1966: 264, 268, 499; Brunot 1967:481-482; Marchello-Nizia 1979:331; Buridant 1987). Very rare in XIIIth and XIVth century texts, it is presumably a Latinism, as shown by its occurrence in authors primarily influenced by the classical tradition, such as Boccaccio or Antoine De la Sale:

- (11) Per la qual cosa alla buona donna con cui dimorava interamente ogni suo accidente aperse e le disse sé disiderare d'andare a Tunisi, acciò che gli occhi saziasse di ciò che gli orecchi con le ricevute voci fatti gli aveano disiderosi. La quale *il suo desiderio* le lodò molto (Decameron, V, 2, § 38)
- (12) E dopo alquanti di partitosi Melisso da Giosefo e tornato a casa sua, a alcun, che savio uomo era, disse ciò che da Salamone avuto avea; il quale gli disse: "Niuno più vero consiglio né migliore ti potea dare" (Decameron, IX, 9, § 34)

- (13) La mattina dunque seguente, in su l'ora del mangiare, primieramente i quatro fratelli di Tedaldo, così vestiti di nero come erano, con alquanti loro amici vennero a casa Aldobrandino, che gli attendeva; e quivi, davanti a tutti coloro che a fare lor compagnia erano stati da Aldobrandino invitati, gittate l'armi in terra, nelle mani d'Aldobrandino si rimisero, perdonanza domandando di ciò che contro a lui avevano adoperato. Aldobrandino lagrimando pietosamente gli ricevette e tutti basciandogli in bocca, con poche parole spacciandosi, *ogni ingiuria ricevuta* rimise (Decameron, III, 7, § 86)
- (14) Lors, au saillir de l'ostel, veissiez chevaulz saillir et contourner, courre, recourre et en l'air tourner, estincelles de feu par l'air voller, crier, huer, ou chascun acouroit, que oncques de telle chose plus joyeuse ne fut. Et ainssy allerent, qu'ilz furent en la grant cour de Saint Pol. Lors chacun *sa joye* renforça; car bien savoient que le roy fust esveillé (PJS, 325)

(Cf. also Martin and Wilmet 1980:280). Most of the examples gathered show the SOV pattern in which O is a backgrounded constituent (O is almost always a [+GIVEN] constituent), but cases such as (12) may occur, where O, although [+GIVEN], is in FOCUS.

It is not possible here to discuss the complex question of the V-2 nature of medieval Romance languages, which according to some would explain the rarity of the SOV type (while the SVO and OVS types fall completely within the rule originally described by Thurneysen). I merely observe that with regard to this I share the scepticism expressed by Marouzeau (1938:94) and Herman (1954: 359, 379).

V in initial position with respect to S and O is a highly minority option in Romance texts of the Middle Ages, as it is in the modern languages and in SVO languages in general. VSO and VOS orders are very rare in French and Italian texts, and more generally in all the historical documentation handed down to us (the type (Adv) + VS occurs with considerable frequency with intransitive verbs: for an examination cf. Sornicola, Barbato, Cesarano & Puolato 1994). As is well known, in Old French initial V is found only in rhythmic prose or verse in the oldest documentation, while the type of structure in which V is preceded by an adverb is much more common. In any case, structures such as the following may still be found in Froissart:

- (15) Enssi estoient adont li seigneur et les terres en le duché d'Acquittainne en grant variement et gueriet de leurs voisins. Si ne savoient li pluseur bonnement que faire. *Or entendi messires Robers Canolles les nouvelles* coumment li Franchois faisoient trefforte guerre au prinche (Chroniques, I, 1, § 757, r. 5)

- (16) Là leur remonstra il moult bellement et sagement coumment en toute honneur et en pais à son pooir il lez avoit maintenus et gouvrenés.... Tout chil baron et chevalier dessus nonmet li jurierent et se obligierent par foy et par sirement que ossi feroient il. *Adont prist li prinches moult doucement congiet à yaux* et se parti assés tost depuis de Bourdiaux (*Chroniques*, I, 1, § 816, r. 23-24)

In (15) and (16) the structure Adv + V + S + O signals a turning point in the narration; in the following example instead the structure has the function of expressing the thematic continuity of V and S, while O is in FOCUS:

- (17) Se le rechupt li prinches à grant joie et le fist tantost cappittainne et souverain de toutes les Compaingnes qui estoient nouvellement venues de Normendie. Si l'envoiea li dis prinches et toutes ces gens d'armes en le terre le comte d'Ermignac et le seigneur de Labrech, pour ardoir et destruire leur pays et faire y guerre car chil li estoient grant ennemi. *Encorres envoiea li prinches son frere monsigneur Ammon et le jone comte de Pennebrucq à tout grant fuison de gens d'armes en le comté de Piergeorch* (*Chroniques*, I, 3, § 750, r. 11-13)

(For inversion after the adverb in Old French cf. Foulet 1919:307ff; Brunot 1966: 268, 499; Herman 1954; for inversion after *et* cf. Bergh 1952, Price 1961:46: this is a stylistic device of Middle French.)

The VSO type often appears in Italian prose of the XIIIth and XIVth centuries as well, with a stylistic value of 'turning point in the narration'; as in French, VS inversion is less frequent with transitive than with intransitives:

- (18) Uno signore di Grecia, lo quale possedea grandissimo reame, e avea nome Aulix, avea uno suo giovane figliuolo, il quale facea nodrire e insegnarli le sette liberali arti, e faceali insegnare vita morale, cioè di be' costumi. *Un giorno tolse questo re molto oro e diello a questo suo figliuolo* (*Novellino*, VIII, 75)
- (19) A questo gran piacere di Pericone e di lei, non essendo la fortuna contenta d'averla di moglie d'un re fatta divenire amica d'un castellano, le si parò davanti più crudele amistà. *Avea Pericone un fratello d'età di venticinque anni, bello e fresco come una rosa, il cui nome era Marato* (*Decameron*, II, 7, § 32)
- (20) Il che come Giosefo ebbe udito, così si ricordò delle parole di Salamone e disse verso Melisso: "...". Quindi, dopo alquanti di divenuti a Antiocia, *ritenne Giosefo Melisso seco a riposarsi alcuni di* (*Decameron*, IX, 9, § 23)

But it is in Old Spanish texts that the patterns (X)VSO, (X)VOS seem to have the widest diffusion, although as minority orders. These structures sometimes have the usual textual function of turning point in the narration, as shown by the fact that they have the pragmatic property of being "all-in-FOCUS" (note that both S and O are [+GIVEN] in the Italian and Spanish examples quoted):

- (21) E fueron para alla, e en las primeras non fallaron recabdo ninguno; mas vno que estaua mas en cabo que todas, dixo que poco tienpo auia que leuaron mercaderos del tres quintales de tales poluos como ellos dezian. E preguntaronle sy fincara alguna cosa ende, e el dixo que non sabia, e fizo como que escrudiñaua sus arcas e sus sacos, e mostroles aquellos pocos de poluos quel auia dado el cauallero. E demandaronle que por quanto gelos daria, e el dixo que non menos de dies doblas. E el cauallero dixo que gelas diesen por ello, syquier por fazer la proeua, e dieronle dies doblas, *e tomo los poluos el mayordomo* e leuolos para el rey. (*Zifar*, 404)
- (22) e [la infante] dixole asy: "... E lo que vos he ha dezir, comoquier que lo digo con grant verguença, es esto: que sy el vuestro casamiento e el mio quesiesse Dios allegar, que me plazeria mucho. E non he mas a dezir, ca a ome de buen entendimiento pocas palabras cunplen." *Desy abaxo los ojos la infante* e pusolos en tierra e non lo pudo catar con grant verguença que ouo de lo que auia dicho. (*Zifar*, 389)

More rarely VSO order is associated with a function of focalization of S:

- (23) E estonçes el enperador mando quel vestiesen de otros paños muy nobles, e çifole el espada e caualgaron e fueronse para casa del enperador, e el infante trayendo el espada desnuya en la vna mano e el pendon en la otra mano con la lança, e la guirnalda en la cabeça. E desque se asentaron a la mesa, *tenia vn cauallero delante el espada desnuya*, e el otro la lança con el pendon, fasta que comieron (*Zifar*, 399)

Elsewhere VSO order seems to occur when an adverbial constituent is in FOCUS in P1 (but the two examples differ in that in the first the prepositional phrase has anaphoric function, in the second cataphoric):

- (24) E porque es el alma espiritual e el cuerpo elemental, *por eso ha el alma uirtud de guiar el cuerpo* (*Zifar*, 270)
- (25) Ca Dios non fizo el ome como las otras animalias mudas, a quien non dio razon nin entendimiento, e non saben nin entienden que fazen... *E por eso dio Dios al ome entendimiento e razon*, por que se podiese guardar del mal e fazer bien (*Zifar*, 269)

The frequently observed V-initial structures in Spanish have been ascribed to the influence of Arabic; but this hypothesis does not appear to have been sufficiently substantiated (cf. Lapesa 1980: 153-154 and fn 37). If, however, external influences are sought, Biblical Latin cannot be altogether ruled out: it is well-known, for example, that in a text such as the *Peregrinatio Aegeriae* there is a high incidence of V-initial structures, both with intransitive and transitive verbs, and that this reflects contemporary cultural models of the Latin of Biblical translations.

3. *Discontinuity or minor temporary fluctuations?*

In trying to decide whether or not WO patterns of the Romance languages conform to a diachronic model of continuity or discontinuity, account should be taken of an inherent limitation of historical linguistics, that is, that the properties established concern texts and not necessarily languages.

With respect to the picture drawn in § 2 modern Romance languages appear to have minor differences. SVO order has a very high frequency in the various contemporary languages, both written and spoken. This applies not only to French, but also to Italian and Spanish (cf. Sornicola, Barbato, Cesarano & Puolato 1994; Sornicola forthcoming). For example, in contemporary Italian the average frequency of such a pattern in a textually and stylistically differentiated corpus is 77.5%; OVS order, always marked and contrastive, has an average frequency below 10%, V initial orders have frequencies ranging between 1% and 4% (cf. Sornicola 1994).

SOV and VSO patterns, which in medieval texts appear to be artificial and typical of the educated and literary language, are more or less non-existent in both written and spoken registers of the modern languages. Where they occur, they are associated with prosodic structures in which the *non in situ* constituent has contrastive stress (cf. Sornicola forthcoming). The VSO pattern in particular does not have the function of turning point in the narrative, so typical in medieval texts.

Although they have not entirely died out, OVS and OSV patterns are confined to pragmatically restricted contexts. They are only possible as marked orders in contemporary Italian and Spanish (O is a marked FOCUS, with relevant prosodic properties). In French, the OVS type has now disappeared, while the OSV type (with pronominal S), which was still frequent as a minority order in the XVIth century, is confined to a few marked expressions (cf. Ruelle 1966). In any case, these types do not these days have the function of using O to signal thematic continuity with the left context, as in examples (1-5). In French, this function was still found associated with the OVS pattern in Rabelais (cf. Ruelle 1966:310-311). Structures with left-dislocation of O generally appear with this function today, such as It. *Maria non la posso soffrire* 'Maria I can't stand her', Fr. *Cet élève je l'aime bien* 'This pupil I like very much'. This is not a case of dramatic discontinuity, because this syntactic type is present uninterruptedly in Latin and Romance texts and in other Indo-European languages (cf. Sornicola 1984; Sornicola 1988-89).

Generally speaking, on the structural level, the two most conspicuous differences of WO properties, in comparison with those found in texts of the XIIIth and XIVth centuries, appear to be: the fact that all the non-SVO orders

have a marked FOCUS; absence of S-V inversion when O occupies pre-verbal position, a phenomenon, frequently observed and discussed in the Romance linguistics literature, which falls within the more general 'loss' of S-V inversion. But again, one may well ask to what extent these differences justify the hypothesis of a real 'change'. In both cases, in fact, we are merely conjecturing on a linguistic situation which to a large extent is accessible to us through the distortion of literary or documentary prose. In reality, it may well be claimed that not only the dominant pattern but also the flexibility of the structure have remained substantially unaltered in the various Romance languages. Of course, oscillations in the frequency of each of the patterns in corpora of different periods, and in certain cases in PFs or textual functions, may also be noted. They seem, however, to be connected to the influence of external factors rather than to spontaneous linguistic development. This is especially evident in the diachronic development of French (cf. Sornicola 1995).

The apparent greater freedom of WO patterns in medieval Romance texts may therefore be only an optical illusion brought about by their literary character.

Something which should be given due consideration is the very low frequency of V initial patterns in transitive structures, in all the available documentation (except for the stylistically determined type exemplified in (15-20)). This seems to be the result of an important structural factor, since it allows us to make some more general hypotheses on the role of internal factors in the dynamics of the structure. These seem to operate in a *passive* rather than *active* way: they determine the limits and conditions beyond which flexibility cannot be pushed, that is conditions which prevent change, rather than conditions which actively favour it. As such, they are related to stability rather than to change.

PFs for their part characterize flexibility of the structure, rather than processes of change. For example, in the Romance languages topicalization phenomena have always been a particular option, never grammaticalized in a dominant order, a phenomenon which is also found in other groups of the Indo-European family (for example in Celtic languages, cf. Poppe's contribution to this volume) and in other language families (for example in Hamito-Semitic, cf. Loprieno's and Shisha-Halevy's contributions to this volume). It is doubtful, or at any rate difficult to demonstrate, that the distribution of PFs can determine processes of change in WO.

I would like to emphasize here the importance of the concept of 'stability' as opposed to 'change'. In the study of WO patterns according to the method

defined as 'longitudinal', *stability* rather than *change* emerges as the dominant structural property in conditions where external factors such as contact or the influence of prestigious patterns play no role. Although at first sight this may seem strange, flexibility seems to be directly connected to stability rather than to change. The more flexible a structure is, the more stable it is. In a certain sense, therefore, one could say that flexibility is what guarantees stability.

4. *How old is the SVO trend?*

The Romance historical linguist might perhaps be satisfied with formulating hypotheses on WO based on periods of time stretching from the earliest records of the Romance languages up to today, but not so the typologist. These two types of linguist do not work within the same time scale. The time scale of the typologist has a much longer span than that of the historical linguist. The former could object that a millennium or so is not a sufficient period to appreciate 'change' and that the basic stability which emerges through patterns of order in transitive structures in the Romance languages is in a certain sense foreseeable. From this point of view, the crucial point in a course of change may emerge only by taking into account a longer time span, which includes the Latin period, from the earliest records, and even further back to the earliest documentation of the Indo-European languages. Consideration of the *difference in time scale* is important in defining the problem of stability, variation and change, but it seems to be a premise rather than a solution.

In fact, in the vast bibliography on what today we call the basic order of constituents in the sentence in Latin and in the ancient documentation of the Indo-European languages consensus is far from reached on the basic/dominant order of the various linguistic stages. This is partly due to the fact that the techniques of reconstructive analysis (to which classical typological ones belong) seem to give different results from philological techniques. As to Latin, it is true that the results of Linde's (1923) study suggest a sort of steady increase over time in SVO order compared to SOV, at least from the first century AD up to late Latin records. A fact which seems to me to have a certain interest, however, is that the majority of research carried out with essentially philological techniques questions not only the predominance of SOV order in Latin but also whether it is indeed the basic one (cf. Adams 1976, 1991; Panhuis 1985; Pinkster 1991). Once again the division between literary prose and spoken registers seems to be crucial. Once again we must bear in mind that spoken Latin is only indirectly reflected in written texts, and in a not unproblematic way (cf. Adams' observations on the letters of Claudius

Terentianus [Adams 1977:66ff.]). Recall also Elise Richter's study (Richter 1903): although framed within a methodological perspective belonging to the beginning of the century, it contains a hypothesis which, in short, is not too far removed from that held by Adams in works of the late Seventies (for a critique of Richter from the Romance linguistics perspective cf. Herman 1954).

The same problems arise in an even more complex manner when we try to widen the perspective further back in time, to documentation of the early Indo-European languages. Here, too, we find a sort of polarisation between the results found by researchers using mainly typological reconstructive techniques and the results of those who make use of historical techniques. Of course, the dominance of SOV order in surviving records has been given considerable attention least from the studies of Delbrück onwards. But is it enough to consider this order as the starting point of a linear development which runs from the ancient Indo-European languages up to modern ones? Researchers such as Gonda (cf. Gonda 1952) or Watkins (cf. Watkins 1964; Watkins 1976), who place more emphasis on stylistic variation in texts have, justifiably in my opinion, called attention to WO flexibility in ancient Indo-European languages since the earliest documentation.

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