Cognitive categories and grammatical gender from Latin to Romance

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Abstract

The way in which the evolution of Latin gender has been presented most of the time makes an interesting case, proving -- once again -- that confusing 'real properties' (as perceived by a certain cultural community) and linguistic semantic features, either extensional or intensional, can lead to inappropriate descriptions of linguistic phenomena. If studies of non Indo-European languages pointed to the fact that the scale of "Animacy" differs from one culture to another (see Dahl 2002), historical grammars of Romance languages have interpreted the distribution of genders in Latin according to Western culture, as a way of encoding a 'primitive type of animism'. But the remotivation and even the loss of neuter gender in Romance languages cannot be explained if one fails to account for the fact that Latin non-neuter nouns could also refer to forces of nature and even to things: comp. masculines such as ventus *'wind',* ignis *'fire',* scopulus *'crag, promontory',* lapis *'stone, landmark',* rupes *'cliff' or feminines such as* terra *'earth',* aqua *"water",* fornix *'vault',* ruga *'wrinkle', etc. However [±Animacy] equated with [±Living] has been a feature ingrained in historical accounts of I.E. languages for so long that it has been almost impossible to accept that it should be redefined according to the culture it encodes. In fact, according to several ancient and even contemporary cultures (as reflected or not in religious beliefs), every entity has a soul, a spirit, a special type of energy, as the link with their Creator (or with the Universe). Consequently, the hypothesis of a 'primitive animism' cannot explain the fact that nouns such as* saxum *'stone, rock',* malum *'apple',* mare *'sea',* melos *'tune', are neuter. As Antoine Meillet (1937) pointed out long ago, the gender subclassification of IE nouns encoded 'Agency' (namely the difference between 'être agissant' and 'non agissant') rather than 'Living'. More recently, in order to explain the evolution of I.E. grammatical gender, Luraghi (2009) added to 'Animacy' such features as 'being in control' and 'the capacity of manipulating'. The present contribution brings arguments in favor of the hypothesis that the gender subclassification of nouns in Latin was rooted in an earlier Mediterranean culture, in which the cognitive category of 'Efficacy' reflected a perception of the '(in)capacity of doing, affecting other beings' as an inherent property of objects (see Aristotle's* Metaphysics*). In consequence of different if not even contradictory cultural, civic, social and religious characteristics of the peoples that came into contact at various times within the Roman world, this '(in)capacity of being effective' ceased to be encoded in an inherent semantic feature in Romance languages, whereas a feature such as 'being an Agent' remained a contextually assigned role. The 'Efficacy' hypothesis has a higher explanatory power than other current hypotheses because it can be the starting point for explaining a whole sequence of changes in various Romance grammatical categories such as gender, voice and aspect.*

Key words: animacy, efficacy, feminine, masculine, neuter, natural/grammatical gender

1. Introduction

The way in which the evolution of Latin gender has usually been presented most of the time makes an interesting case, proving -- once again -- that confusing 'real properties' (as perceived by a certain cultural community) and linguistic semantic features, either extensional or intensional, can lead to inappropriate descriptions of linguistic phenomena. For more than one hundred years, historical grammars of Romance languages have interpreted the distribution of genders in Latin according to Western culture, as a way of encoding two main inherent semantic oppositions: [Animate vs. Inanimate], usually considered as corresponding to the property of being living or not, and [Masculine vs. Feminine]. The neuter gender was considered as a marker governed by the semantic inherent feature [-Living], whereas the difference between masculine and feminine would have encoded features belonging to the subcategory [+Living].[1] The fact that nouns referring to entities that we would perceive as inanimate beings were of masculine or feminine gender was attributed to a primitive conception labeled as 'animism'.[2] Compare (1) a and b:

    (1) a. masculine nouns: *fulgor* 'lightening', *tunitrus* 'thunder', *ventus* 'wind'

       b. feminine nouns: *terra* 'earth', *aqua* 'water', *fornix* 'vault', *casa* 'cottage, hut'

However, the hypothesis of a 'primitive animism' is far from accounting for the difference between the semantic features encoded by Latin neuter and non-neuter grammatical genders. See, for example, (2) a and b:

    (2) a. neut. *saxum* 'stone, rock' vs. masc. *lapis* 'stone, landmark', *rupes* 'cliff';

       b. neut. *mare* 'sea, salt water' vs. masc. *pontus* 'sea' and fem. *aqua* 'water'.

Why would *saxum* be neuter and *lapis* or *rupes* be masculine, when they share semes encoding features characterizing the concept of 'stone'? Why would *pontus* be masculine and *aqua*, feminine whereas *mare* would be neuter?

As is widely known, according to several ancient and even contemporary cultures (as reflected or not in religious beliefs), every entity has a soul, a spirit, a special type of energy, as the link with their Creator (or with the Universe). In some universes of beliefs, even stones, for example, are supposed to have a 'spirit', because they have the capacity of 'suffering' erosion, decay, etc. The hypothesis which considers that the Latin noun classes are based on the feature [±Animate], conceived as an expression of [±Living], also fails to account for the evolution of neuter gender, which

supposedly encoded the feature [Non-living], in various Romance languages. When the label is still present in Romance grammars, it refers to a variety of phenomena that differ fundamentally from their Latin counterpart, namely: low individuation, impossibility of specifying gender distinctions (collective animates, reference to utterances: pro-sentences), etc.[3]

2. Changing culture – changing grammar.

Studies of non Indo-European languages point to the fact that the 'Animacy hierarchy' differs from one culture to another.[4] For example, if one compares contemporary Western European with Australian languages, it is easy to realize how much the perception of gender may vary from one linguistic community to another. For example, in Dyirbal there are four genders (see Table 1, apud Dahl (2000a: 104)). In Ngangikurrunggurr there seem to be nine noun subclasses of gender (see Table (2), apud Dahl (2000a:105)). The fact that the concept of Animacy differs from one culture to another is also reflected in the fact that even its linguistic model based on Indo-European languages has changed more than once. As Antoine Meillet (1937) pointed out long ago, the gender subclassification of IE nouns encoded 'Agenthood' (namely the difference between 'être agissant' and 'non agissant') rather than 'living' or the opposite.

Name of gender	General characterization	Examples
I	MALE HUMANS Non-human animates	Men, men, kangaroos, possums, bats, most snakes, fishes, insects, some birds, moon, storms, rainbow, some spears, boomerangs, etc.
II	FEMALE HUMANS water, fire, fighting	women, dogs, bandicoots, platypus. echidna, some snakes, some fishes, most birds, firefly, scorpion, crickets, sun and stars, shields, some spears, some trees, etc.
III	Non-flesh food	honey, all edible fruit and vegetables and plants that bear them
IV	residue	parts of the body, meat, bees, wind, yam sticks, some spears, most trees and vines, grass, mud, stones, noises and languages

Table 1: Dyirbal

Name of gender	Includes	Name of gender	Includes
I	most natural objects, kinship terms, some body parts	V	most animals hunted for meat
II	hunting weapons	VI	edible plants
III	most body parts	VII	male animates (excl. dogs)
IV	trees, most wooden implements	VIII	female animates
		IX	canines

Table 2: Ngangikurrunggurr

Compare the following distribution of nouns:[5]

(i) 'acting force (*force agissante*)': masculine or feminine

    (3) masculine: *ignis* 'fire', *ventus* 'wind', like *vir* 'man'

      feminine: *terra* 'earth', *arbor* 'tree', like *femina* 'woman',

  (ii) 'passives (*force non-agissante*)': neuter

  (4) *saxum* 'stone', *templum* 'temple', *tempus* 'time'; most nouns referring to fruit: *pirum* 'pear', *prunum* 'prune'; generics for species: *animal* 'animal'.

Since some entities can be active in some contexts, and passive in others, it is necessary to distinguish between the virtual and the actual properties of the referents. The 'capacity of being a doer (active, effective)' is a virtual property of the referent that might be encoded in an inherent semantic feature (seme) of the noun. The property of 'being a doer' is the actualization of this capacity in certain conditions. The seme encoding this property, namely 'actual Efficacy', depends upon the context: [Actually ineffective] could occur with nouns characterized either by [Virtually ineffective] or by [Virtually effective]. On the other hand, the seme [Actually effective] could occur only with nouns characterized by the seme [Virtually effective]. In other words, [Actually effective] occurs in the neutralizing position. Consequently it constitutes the unmarked term of the opposition, which should be defined as [±Actually ineffective] or, in more familiar words, as [±Passive].

An interesting definition of the feature 'capacity for affecting other entities' as

an inherent property of objects may be found already in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (Book Δ, Chapter 12) under the name of δύναμις, δυνατόν – ἀδυναμία, ἀδύνατον (roughly 'capacity' – 'incapacity'):

> We call a CAPACITY what originates a change or alteration either in another thing or qua other, as for instance house building is a capacity which is not a constituent of the things being built, but doctoring, which is a capacity, might be a constituent of the thing being doctored, but not of it being doctored. (Aristotle, Metaphysics, in Kirwan, 1993: 46)

And further on:

> INCAPACITY is lack of capacity, i.e. of the kind of origin described, either in general or by something which characteristically possesses it or even at a time already characteristic of its possession. For people would not assert in the same way that a boy, a grown man, and a eunuch are incapable of begetting. Again, corresponding to each of the two capacities (for merely changing things, and for changing them satisfactorily) there is an opposite incapacity (Aristotle, Metaphysics, in Kirwan, 1993:47).

It is to be noted at this point that the notion of CAPACITY is confined to a specific type of capacity, i.e. the capacity of doing something (change or alteration) and it is partially synonymous with the cognitive model of prototypical causation as defined by Lakoff (1987: 54-55), as a cluster of the following interactional properties:

1. There is an agent that does something.
2. There is a patient that undergoes a change to a new state.
3. Properties 1 and 2 constitute a single event; they overlap in time and space; the agent comes into contact with the patient.
4. Part of what the agent does (either motion or the exercise of will) precedes the change in the patient.
5. The agent is the energy source; the patient is the energy goal; there is a transfer of energy from agent to patient.
6. There is a single definite agent and a single definite patient.
7. The agent is human.
8. a. The agent wills his action.

   b. The agent is in control of his action.

   c. The agent bears primary responsibility both for his action and for the change.
9. The agent uses his hands, body, or some instrument.
10. The agent is looking at the patient, the change in the patient is perceptible, and the agent perceives the change.

It is very likely that not all of these ten properties were relevant for categorizing nouns in Latin. However it is not impossible to imagine that, according to the Latin conception of the universe, some forces (though not persons) could be viewed as entities that control and act with a purpose.[6]

As the beginning of the 1980s, Comrie (1981) considered that it would be inappropriate to reduce 'animacy' to the idea of 'living'. As a matter of fact he advances a hypothesis which combines a complex of features that should be represented as a hierarchy:

> the animacy hierarchy cannot be reduced to any single parameter, [...] but rather reflects a natural human interaction among several parameters, which include animacy in the strict sense, but also definiteness (perhaps the easiest of the other parameters to extricate from animacy), and various means of making an entity more individuated -- such as giving it a name of its own, and thereby making it also more likely as a topic of conversation. The various individual parameters that we have discussed in this chapter are often closely related to one another, but there are also individual irreducible differences, and the over-all pattern is of a complex intertwining rather than of a single, linearly hierarchy. (Comrie (1981:192)).

For Dahl (2000a) the features 'Person' and 'Agent' occupy the highest place in the animacy hierarchy:

> In Dahl-Fraurud [forthcoming], we argue that what has been referred to in literature as the animacy hierarchy is essentially a reflection of different ways of realizing grammatically a fuzzy dichotomy, at the base of which is the distinction between persons, that is essentially human beings perceived as agents, and the rest of the universe. The dichotomy is fuzzy because we have the possibility of sometimes treating inanimate entities as persons and, perhaps, less often human beings as nonpersons, in one sense or the other. This also shows up clearly in gender systems: it is misleading, in most cases, to think of ANIMAL as a single 'step' in the hierarchy – rather, gender distinctions often cut through the animal kingdom, with at least some higher animals being treated as persons and at least some lower ones beings seen as inanimate. When discussing gender, then it is more fruitful to think of the hierarchy as a ... [continuum] In the end, the existence of types of borderline cases of personhood, such as 'no personal agents', including organizations, companies, states etc., and metaphorical and metonymical references to inanimate and abstract entities of different kinds, destroys the possibility of assuming that this continuum can be seen as one-dimensional ordering. (Dahl, 2000a: 100).

More recently, according to Luraghi (2009:10 - 11), which deals with the origins of feminine gender in Proto Indo European, the Animacy hierarchy should be reformulated taking into account features such as 'concrete', 'manipulated', 'intentional', 'control', 'individuated' (see Table 3). In the second stage Animate referred typically to 'humans', a category that later split into two subcategories: 'masculine' and 'feminine' (see Table 4). Both were

characterized by the same capacity of being in control and non-manipulated. The third class, the inanimates, lacked the capacity of being in control and could be manipulated. As Roman Jakobson (1963) emphasized, the grammatical categories encode only those features considered as the most important characteristics of objects in the life of a society.

I HUMAN	II ABSTRACT	III INANIMATE CONCRETE
concrete	abstract, non-manipulated	concrete, manipulated
+intentional	-intentional	-intentional
+control	+control	-control
highly individuated	moderately individuated	non-individuated
plural count		collective

Table 3. Prototypical features of Proto-Indo-European genders

Stage 1	Animate		Inanimate	
Stage 2	Human		Abstract	Concrete
Stage 3	Masculine	Feminine		Neuter

Table 4. The Indo-European gender system: summary of evolution

In other words, grammatical categories encode the cognitive categories that reflect the way a given community of speakers perceives and interacts with the world.[7] The distribution of the feature [±Control] in Luraghi's model suggests that in the culture of some ancient peoples the distinction between entities characterized by the capacity of controlling and manipulating other entities (in short, capable of affecting human life) and those incapable of so doing was an important factor in their everyday experience.[8]

In what follows we intend to bring arguments in favor of the hypothesis that the gender subclassification of nouns in Latin was rooted in an earlier Mediterranean culture, in which the cognitive category of 'Virtual Efficacy' encoded in grammatical gender, reflected a perception of the '(in)capacity of doing, affecting other beings' as an inherent property of objects.

3. Efficacy Hierarchy

3.1.   Morpho-syntactic features supporting the Efficacy Hierarchy.

Since the majority of Latin nouns (especially in the 3rd and 4th declensions) do not have an explicit gender morpheme distinct from the stem, the gender of a noun is recognized by the gender of its modifiers (pronouns and adjectives). The labels assigned to the four main categories of agreement are as follows:

(i)   masculine:

(5)   *vir bonus...   is*

      man bonus:MASC   he:MASC

      'good man. .. he...'

(ii)   feminine:

(6)   femina bona...   ea...

      woman good:FEM... she:FEM

      'good woman... she...'

(iii)   neuter:

(7)   vinum   bonum...   id...

      wine   good:NEUT   it:NEUT

      'good wine... it...'

(iv)   nomina communia:

(8)   cives   bonus ...   is... cives bona...   ea...

      citizen   good:MASC ... he...   citizen good:FEM...   she ...

      'good citizen (man)...he...'   'good citizen (woman)... she...'

3.1.1. Syncretism of Nominative and Accusative

The hypothesis that the Latin neuter is considered as a distributional class of nouns reflecting a feature which deals with the incapacity of being actively and effectively involved in the event can account for the fact that neuter nouns always syncretize the nominative (the case of the topic or of the subject par excellence) with the accusative (the direct-object case). This syncretism recalls the behavior of an ergative language, in which the ergative case is the marker of the noun expressing an 'active, effective entity'. The distinction between nouns carrying the feature [+Efficacy] and those carrying the opposite feature

is more important than the syntactic distinction between subject and object.[9] A relic of this interpretation may be illustrated by the following Latin examples:

(9) Marcus   saxu**m**   mouit
     Marcus:NOM   stone:ACC.SG   moved:3rd.SG
     'Marc moved the stone'

(10) saxu**m**   mouit
      stone:NOM.SG   moved:3rd.SG
      'the stone moved',

where *saxum* has the same ending either as a direct object (9) or as a subject(10).[10]

3.1.2. The morpheme –M as a direct object marker

These morpho-semantic properties cannot be unrelated to the fact that neuter morphemes (for subject and direct object) are identical with accusative morphemes in feminine or masculine nouns in singular across declension boundaries.[11] The Latin accusative is a typical case for the non-effective participant. Compare (11) a and b:

(11) a. neuter: *templu**m***
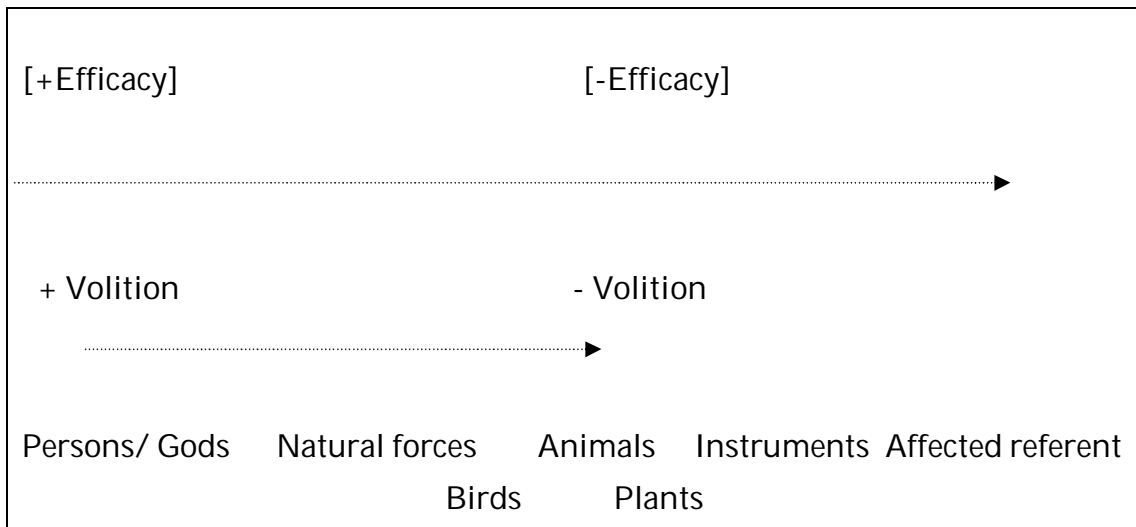   'temple':NEUT.NOM/ACC

    b. non-neuter:
       masculine: *servu**m***   and feminine: *femina**m***.
              'servant': ACC   'woman':ACC

3.1.3. The features of the agentive Noun Phrase.

Another syntactic feature that supports our hypothesis may be found in the behavior of the Prepositional Phrase in passive constructions. As Ernout and Thomas (1953: 207-208) point out, the construction of the passive Prepositional Phrase *ab* + NP is acceptable for nouns referring to the following concepts:

(12)   'persons': ***a*** *tyranno uapulaui* 'I was struck by the tyrant',
        Seneca,   *Contr.* 9.4,2

(13)   'animals': *superamur **a** bestiis,* 'we are surpassed by (the)
        animals' Cic., *Fi.* 2,111

(14)   'birds': ***ab*** *aquila ... impositum* 'inflicted ... by [an/the] eagle' ,
        Cic., *Leg.* 1,4

(15)   'things' (which we would consider as inanimate), entailing the
        idea of activity: *luna* 'moon', *sol* 'sun', *natura* 'nature'

(16)   'inner states': *felicitas* 'happiness'; *uirtus* 'virtue', etc. ***ab*** *his*
        virtutibus tot uitia superari, 'so many vices to be surpassed by
        these virtues', Cic., *Cat.* 2, 25.

All these morpho-syntactic features lead us to the conclusion that the capacity
of being effective was encoded in an inherent seme of nouns. See Table 5.

[+Efficacy]		[-Efficacy]

[+Efficacy]   [-Efficacy]

⸳⸳▶

 + Volition   - Volition

      ⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳⸳▶

Persons/ Gods   Natural forces   Animals   Instruments Affected referent
                              Birds   Plants

Table 5. Hierarchy of Virtual Efficacy

3.2. Socio-cognitive arguments supporting the Efficacy Hypothesis

As in any other language, Latin noun classes correspond in fact to cognitive
prototypical categories, namely to a classification of objects according to the
way a certain linguistic community perceives, interprets, and conceives its
environment.[12]

After analyzing various approaches to the prototype theory leading up to the model of cognitive categories, Lakoff (1987: 56-57) presents a list of relevant characteristics, two of which can explain satisfactorily the fact that noun classes are culture-dependent, since they encode a human subcategorization of the state of affairs, namely:

(i)Categories are organized into systems with contrasting elements. Human categories are not objectively 'in the world' external to human beings. [...] Basic-level structures depend on human perception, imaging capacity, motor capabilities, etc.,

and

(ii)The properties relevant to the description of categories are interactional properties, properties characterizable only in terms of the interaction of human beings as part of their environment. Prototypical members of categories are sometimes describable in terms of clusters of such interactional properties. These clusters act as gestalts: the cluster as a whole is psychologically simpler than its parts.

At this point it is necessary to specify that the *environment* is not necessarily confined to social structures but encompasses a variety of interconnected worlds:

1. the *social organization* of a linguistic community;

2. the *natural world*, knowledge of which is determined by scientific developments and individual and collective experience;

3. the *supernatural world*, reflected in religious representations. Religious beliefs are shaped both by knowledge of natural world and by social organization.

In brief, the morpho-syntactic and cultural evidence supports the morpho-semantic hypothesis that associates the category of neuter nouns with the feature [+Virtual Inefficacy], and the opposite category (masculine and feminine nouns) with the unmarked feature [-Virtual Inefficacy]. The class of non-neuters comprising masculine and feminine distributional classes seems to correspond prototypically to those entities capable of being effective (in the sense that they could affect human life), such as men and women or natural forces such as wind, fire, earth, etc. (see Meillet 1921. 1: 199-229 and 1937.2: 24 - 28).[13] The inclusion of nouns referring to such forces in the same grammatical gender as women, for example, reminds us of the most prototypical attributes characterizing the concept of the ancient goddess in the Mediterranean area, as well as in other ancient cultures such as Celtic cosmogony (see Eisler (1988), Ryan & Pitman (2000)). As Eisler (1988: 36)

emphasizes:

> In the mythical images of Crete — the Goddess Mother of the universe, and humans, animals, plants, water, and sky as her manifestations here on earth — we find the recognition of our oneness with nature, a theme that is today also reemerging as a prerequisite for economical survival.

As (17) shows, many feminine Latin nouns exemplify all these attributes of the ancient Goddess:

(17)   life: *vita* 'life', *anima* 'soul, spirit'

        death: *mors*,

        fertility, sustenance: *terra* 'earth', fruit trees: *pirus* 'pear tree', *prunus* 'prune tree', etc., *aqua* 'water', *farina* 'flour'

        protection (the mother's womb): *casa* 'lodge', *domus* 'house', *toga*

It is far from easy to determine to what extent the idea that things could or could not be considered as inherently (in)capable of being effective or assigned qualities of women and men was still relevant for Latin speakers. What is beyond doubt is that the religious universe was full of representations reflecting the socio-cultural organization of the Latin linguistic community. One only has to think of the extent to which natural forces were represented in Latin and Greek mythology by men and women.

The changes in noun subcategorization (especially in the domain of 'forces'), which are responsible for the reorganization of the grammatical gender in Romance languages must have been triggered by various socio-cultural and linguistic factors. According to our hypothesis, the changes in the cognitive categories based on the inherent feature of [± Virtually (in)effective] must have been triggered by several factors derived from new types of interaction between human beings and their environment, due to contacts if not even clashes between a variety of ethnic and socio-cultural structures:

> (i) At the dawn of the Common Era, the social structure of the Roman Empire is characterized by the clash between three different types: Roman Republic, City-state (Greek), Near Eastern Temple-state (Judean).

> (ii) At the religious level, Mediterranean polytheism meets Judean and Dacian monotheism, which opens the doors for a new religion, Christianity.[14] More than half a century ago, Muller (1945) already emphasized the role played by Christianity in the reconfiguration of the romanized peoples' mentality and, consequently, in the encoding of new cognitive categories.

> (iii) Contact between several ethnic groups, with their own type of culture.

(iv) Contact between different types of languages encoding different cognitive categories that reflected different interpretations of the 'state of affairs'.[15]

It is obvious that the clashes between these cultures could lead to the loss of civic, religious, linguistic, and even ethnic identity, which would have dramatic consequences for the perception of the world and trigger the reorganization of cognitive categories.[16] The link between natural gender and grammatical gender (encoding inherent semantic features such [±Virtual Efficacy]) becomes even more blurred. The only distinction in natural gender which seems to have been capable of persisting through this cognitive reorganization rests on the prototypical difference between males and females.[17] In Romance languages the impact of cultural changes on the structure of grammatical categories is clearly visible in the increase in the productivity of the opposition between the feminine and the masculine grammatical genders that encodes the difference between 'males' and 'females' in the domain of high-ranking professions.[18]

4. Conclusions

The hypothesis emphasizing the role of [±Virtual Efficacy] in the gender classification of Latin nouns does not contradict the view that the development of *a grammatical gender* is not based merely on cognitive and semantic changes of one kind or another. On the one hand, the loss of the previous semantic motivation opened the possibility for the impact of morphological analogy, which led to redistributing nouns in different grammatical classes.[19] On the other hand, the *phatic function* of agreement acquired a more important role than the semantic motivation and contributed to the preservation of syntactically defined classes of nouns.[20]

Notes

1. Current definitions of 'animate' always refer to the feature 'living'. For example, in the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (2008) *animate* (adjective) is defined as related to life, living: **1**: possessing or characterized by life: **ALIVE 2**: full of life: **ANIMATED 3**: of or relating to **animal** life as opposed to plant life **4**: referring to a living thing <an *animate* noun>. Etymology: Middle English, from Latin *animatus,* past participle of *animare* to give life to, from *anima* 'breath, soul'; akin to Old English *ōthian* 'to breathe', Latin *animus* 'spirit', Greek *anemos* 'wind', Sanskrit *aniti* 'he breathes'. Even in a 21th c. book such as Ball (2000: 218): 'Animate nouns refer to living beings (people, animals), inanimate nouns to objects or abstractions.'

2. In the same *Webster's Dictionary, animism* is defined as follows: (derived from *anima* 'soul'): '1. The belief that all life is produced by a spiritual force separate from matter; 2. the belief that natural phenomena and objects, as rocks, trees, the wind, etc., are alive and have souls'.

3 See Stathi et alii eds. (2010), Smith (2007), Acquaviva (2002), Manoliu-Manea (1994), Ojeda (1993), Bonfante (1961), Spitzer (1941) inter alia. Spitzer's expression 'the

femininization of the neuter' (1941: 339-371), encompasses a series of phenomena such as:: (i) *the loss of the plural value*: see the singular feminine of nouns referring to fruit (comp. Lat. neuter: *pirum – pira* 'pear – pears', but feminine: Fr. *la poire*, It. *pera*, Rom *pară*, etc.); (ii) *the reshaping of agreement*: cf. masculine in the singular and feminine in the plural: It. *il uovo – le uova* 'the (MASC.SG) egg – the(FEM.PL) eggs', Rom *un scaun - două scaune* 'a (MASC.SG) chair – two (FEM.PL) chairs', (iii) the impossibility of specifying the gender either natural or grammatical (collective nouns: Rom *popor* 'people'; neuter pronouns: Fr. *ça*, Sp. *esto, eso*, *aquello, lo,* etc.- see Sp. *Que es esto?* Rum. *Ce-i asta?* 'What is this?'). For languages which used neuter as a default gender in predicative nouns when referring to mixed-gender antecedents see Hock, 2009. In Romanian, however, there is a distinction between animates and inanimates (things) regarding the selection of gender in predicative adjectives: (i) masculine for animates: *băiatul şi fetiţa sunt veseli* 'the boy (MASC) and the girl (FEM) are glad (MASC)' but (ii) feminine for things: *poarta şi peretele sunt proaspăt vopsite* 'the door (FEM) and the wall (MASC) are recently painted (FEM.PL) like the neuter nouns: *candelabrul şi scaunele sunt pline de praf* 'the candelabrum (NEUT.SG) and the chairs (NEUT:PL) are full (FEM.PL) of dust'. It is also interesting to mention here the fact that the semantic features associated with prototypical subjects in Romance include Agency rather than Animacy. See Siller-Runggaldier (2012, 7): 'Alla luce di questa tripartitionie I soggeti prototipici sono quindi SNi con explicita codifica morfosintactica, con ruolo semantico di agente e con funzione pragmatica di topic, il che presupone la loro definiteza referenziale'. See also Koch (1995).

4.See Dahl (2000a), Hursakainen (2000).

5. For the interpretation of [agenthood] as a semantic inherent feature of Latin nouns see also Cameron (1985).

6. In Foley and Van Valin (1984: 290-300) the usual term for an active participant is *doer.* It is the argument of a predicate that corresponds to the participant who performs, effects, instigates or controls the situation denoted by the predicate. According to Aranovich (2009), the feature 'volition' became more important in the Romance lexico-semantic agenthood hierarchy than in Latin. In post-modern philosophy (Foucault, for example), 'Agency' includes the feature 'volition' that presupposes 'free choice'.

7. See also Kleiber (1990). It is also interesting to note at this point that, almost thirty years ago, Beaugrande & Dressler (1984: 146) defined the **real world** as 'the socially dominant model of the human situation and its environment'. As a matter of fact, differences in the perception of the world can be encoded in different lexical mapping even when comparing languages of Western Europe. For example, the same bird, the hummingbird, is designated according to the sound its wings make in English: *humming – hummingbird*, according to its size in French: *oiseau-mouche* lit. 'bird – fly', or as one that kisses a flower in Portuguese: *beija - flor* lit. 'kisses-flower', not to mention the fact that nowadays, in the age of interplanetary exploration, even in Western culture the divine creation of human beings is interpreted as a genetic mutation due to a DNA transplant from and by Extraterrestrials.

8. Maiden & Robustelli (2000: 266) and Aranovich (2009: 33-34) also introduce a semantico-syntactic feature such as 'degrees of agenthood' in order to explain the selection of the auxiliaries in the Romance compound perfect.

9. For a detailed presentation of ergativity see Givón (1984: 151 -168). In a subclass of ergative languages, the *ergative* marked the subject in a transitive construction with a deliberate initiator agent and a clearly affected patient, whereas both the direct object of a transitive construction and the subject of an intransitive construction took the *absolutive* case. For the relation between ergativity and syntax, see also Dragomirescu (2010). Hewson (2007) points out that in Germanic the promotion of inanimates to the role of subject was a late development, which triggered the necessity for a passive voice.

10. Since this syncretism is found in neuters of every Latin declension, *−m* is not the only neuter morphological marker since the nominative may have different endings: e.g. *animal, calcar* 'spur', *os* 'mouth', *cornu* 'horn'.

11. See also other accusative forms in *−m* for 'animates' belonging to different declensions: *leonem* 'lion' (3rd decl.); *tribum* 'tribe' (4th decl.); *plebeiem* 'common people' (5th decl.).

12. See also Kleiber (1990) and Craig, ed. (1986). There is evidence to suggest that the ending -**s** originates in a nominative marker that occurred only with nouns carrying the feature [+Active/ Effective] (see Lyons, 2001: 356; Wolfe, 1980).

13. It might be interesting to note that a word such as *manus* 'hand' of feminine gender has also the meaning 'force'.

14. *Zalmoski*, the name of the only Dacian god, might be related to the Thracian word for 'earth', **zamol*. Comparisons have also been made with the name of *Zemelo* and *Žemelė*, the Phrygian and Lithuanian goddess of the earth. See Păcurariu, Mircea. *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, compendiu*, Chișinău, 1993.

15. It has been suggested that, in Western cultures dominated by patriarchal thinking, languages which have only two gender agreements (masculine and feminine), feminine nouns often encode the feature [Passivity]. Most passive objects such as urns, vessels, sheaths, and holsters (all waiting to be filled), along with doorways, gates, and thresholds (through which one passes), tend to be feminine (Shlain, 1999: 387). It has been also suggested that in countries such as Britain and the United States, the women's liberation movement could start earlier, in the 19th c., because it was favored by the fact that in English the grammatical gender of nouns does not encode natural gender differences.

16. See Mack (1995) Chapter 1. *Clashing Cultures*: 19-41

17. As Dahl (2000a:102) emphasizes, 'The pervasiveness of sex as gender criterion is striking. There are many possible ways of classifying animates, in particular human beings, that might be used as a basis for gender, such as social status, ethnic origin, profession, age, hair color, etc., but none of them except perhaps age seems to play important role in gender assignment. The frequency of sex-based gender distinctions to some extent hides the importance of animacy'.

18. See recently: Madame la Ministre de la Santé (Le Monde.fr. – 24, 12, 2009), ne avocate parisienne (Le Monde.fr, 25, 12, 2009), principale auteure de l'étude (Le Monde.fr. 31, 08, 2011), Moers, co-autrice de l'étude et professeure en biodiversité à l'université Simon Fraser de Vancouver et la chercheuse ... Le Monde.fr. 29, 2012..

19. Cf. Lat. *domus*, *–us*, that was feminine but became masculine in Romance languages because it ended in the vowel *u* (>*o*): Cf. It. *il duomo*, Fr. *le dome*, like Lat. masc. *ventus* (It. *il vento*, Sp. *el viento*, Fr. *le vent*).

20. For more details concerning the function of agreement see Jakobson (1963), inter alia. As a matter of fact, according to the hypothesis advanced long ago by Brugmann (1897) and developed later by Fodor (1959), Ibrahim (1973), Lehmann (1979), grammatical gender in Indo-European first developed through agreement (or 'concord').

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