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Review Of "The Romance Languages" By R. Posner

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Chapter 7, finally, challenges the rule of Quantifier raising, first proposed in the Seventies and still currently assumed. Posner discusses what criteria one looks for in grouping a set of languages into families. Certainly a shared lexicon is an obvious starting point. Posner goes so far as to claim that a speaker of one Romance language will recognize at least half of the common words in any other Romance language (87). However, if we were to use a lexical criterion based only on recognition, languages that have borrowed heavily from Romance sources would be included; English would be a Romance language. While English is highly Frenchified, classifying it as Romance is a mistake from the point of view of morphology and syntax. So the type of shared lexicon bears no guarantee that the languages are Romance, only that they are Romanic. The number of conjugations and their identification via theme vowel, the range of tenses and moods — all of these are quite similar across Romance and all originate in Latin. Syntactic characteristics are, likewise, helpful. The development of clitics, their doubling, the distinctions between proclitics and enclitics, clitic climbing, all of these and more are handled here. Characteristics that are common to many daughter languages and that were not common to Latin are discussed. When daughters change in similar ways, we need to consider factors such as inherited peripheral phenomena, the weight of tradition, influence between the daughters, and common external influences, not just the possibility that the relevant changes occurred in the proto-language before the divergence into the daughters. In this regard, for phonology Posner discusses diphthongization and metaphony (the Romance rubric for umlaut). With morphological and syntactic characteristics to help in identifying Romance languages, Creoles with one Romance language base and which often have a lexicon that is highly recognizable to Romance speakers fall outside the family. Posner points out that creoles generally have uninflected ('invariable') verb forms with tense, aspect, and modality often
This second volume of articles on the tense systems of European languages consists of an editorial introduction, two essays on Germanic languages, four on Romance languages, four on other Indo-European languages, and two on non-Indo-European languages of Europe, as follows: Rolf Thieroff ‘More on inherent verb categories in European languages’ (1–36), Maria Bonner ‘Zum Tempussystem des Isländischen’ (37–58, on Icelandic), Östen Dahl ‘The tense system of Swedish’ (59–68), Hans Petter Helland ‘A compositional analysis of the French tense system’ (69–94), Fátima Oliveira and Ana Lopes ‘Tense and aspect in Portuguese’ (95–115), Mario Squartini ‘Tense and aspect in Italian’ (117–134), Martin Haase ‘Tense, aspect and mood in Romanian’ (135–152), Heinz Vater ‘The tense system of Polish’ (153–165), Ronald Lötzsch ‘Das sorbische Tempussystem’ (167–179), Jadranka Gvozdanović ‘Western South Slavic tenses in a typological perspective’ (181–194), Tania Kuteva ‘Bulgarian tenses’ (195–213), Nijole Sližienė ‘The tense system of Lithuanian’ (215–232), Eva Hedin ‘The tense aspect system of Modern Greek’ (233–251), Jean-Louis Duchet ‘The Albanian tense system’ (253–275), Natalia Kozintseva ‘The tense system of Modern Eastern Armenian’ (277–297), Helle Metslang and Hannu Tommola ‘Zum Tempussystem des Estnischen’ (299–326, on Estonian), and Ray Fabri ‘The tense and aspect system of Maltese’ (327–343); a list of contributors, including e-mail addresses, appears on page 345. As is indicated in the titles of the references to Creoles, the attention to different standards for grouping languages, and the references to relatively recent generative ways of approaching various phenomena make the book interesting and suggest its use as a text in courses on comparative Romance, particularly for the undergraduate, where breadth without (sometimes tedious) depth is more apt to be appreciated.

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