

DIVERGENCE, FRAGMENTATION, AND THE «LOCUS» OF CHANGE

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What is it that actually changes during the course of a linguistic change? The problem still has no generally accepted answer; this paper suggests that an analysis of the difference between divergence and fragmentation may help us find a solution.

1. Divergence and Fragmentation

Romance linguists have acquired the habit of talking about the «fragmentation» of Latin into the separate Romance languages. This is presented as being a natural and unsurprising event, symbolized on paper with the traditional tree diagrams (e.g. Hall 1974: 13-15); in these a tree-trunk, symbolizing Latin, is seen to break up into separate branches (or roots, since the «trunk» language is usually presented at the top of the diagram). Such a representation is unexceptional for a tree, and the question of whether languages are in fact like trees and tree-roots is thereby neatly begged. Since the separate Romance modes are generally accepted to be distinct languages now, differentiated on a simple geographical basis, we have to accept that this fragmentation must indeed have happened, even though specialists can legitimately differ about the chronology of the splits and how many different Romance languages exist. But it may not have been as straightforward an event as it has usually been presented as being; for the rise of geographical variation (divergence) does not necessarily lead to fragmentation, and it is worth considering why it ever should.

Within Historical Linguistics in general, the prime case, the exemplar for all subsequent analyses, has been the development of both the Indo-European languages and the scientific discipline that aims to explain how the family has come to be as it is. Here too, there can be no doubt that fragmentation is a fair description for what happened, although this actual term is less often used by Indo-Europeanists than it is by Romanists. Indo-European is not a single language now, and neither is Romance: or to put it in another perspective, Urdu is not a variant form of Irish any more than Parisian French is a variant of Portuguese.

Larry Trask's superb *The Dictionary of Historical and Comparative Linguistics* (2000) has no entry for *fragmentation*; the closest equivalent there is *breakup*, which, as a noun, is not particularly common in this sense. Trask explains it as:

«The process in which continuing change among the regional dialects of a language results in such substantial regional differences that we can no longer speak of dialects and are forced instead to speak of separate languages» (Trask 2000: 46). The «we» in this explanation refers to the historical linguists, rather than to the speakers of the language(s) themselves, who may or may not share the same metalinguistic perspective as the historical linguists; and the idea that we are «forced» to make such a metalinguistic leap, and speak of separate languages where hitherto we spoke of just one, bears further investigation. It is not at all clear who or what can force the modern analysts to suspend our instinctive desire to be judicious about such decisions.

Whether fragmentation has actually happened or not can be a moot point. English varies a great deal from place to place, and, although some specialists (such as Melchers and Shaw 2003) speak of «Englishes», these different units are usually thought of as being only partly distinguishable varieties within the larger single entity of English, rather than being separate languages entirely. This widely variable English monolingualism may perhaps be about to change in the near future, although Tom McArthur, undoubtedly the most authoritative expert in the field, implies this is less likely than the continuation of the present state of multiple variation (McArthur 2002). The case of Chinese brings this dilemma out even more starkly than English does, as Trask's *Dictionary* makes clear; under the entry for *Chinese* (Trask 2000: 57) we are told that «The Chinese themselves prefer to speak of the 'dialects' of Chinese, but in fact the several Chinese languages differ from one another so substantially that they are unquestionably distinct languages by any linguistic criteria». And yet, whether we feel forced to come to such a conclusion or not, an observer might wonder why historical linguists from the other side of the world should know better than the actual speakers of the language concerned. The answer to the conundrum which is so accurately posed in Trask's comment here must be, at least partly, that the decision whether different forms of speech are related dialects, and thus the result of divergence, or related but separate languages, and thus the result of fragmentation (breakup), is not one that is essentially made on linguistic criteria. There is no list of necessary and sufficient conditions which can tell us decisively whether the way people talk in (say) Beijing and Hong Kong, or in Vancouver and Pakistan, or in Buenos Aires and Oviedo, or in Guadaloupe and Toulouse, or in Rio de Janeiro and Braga, or in Marrakesh and Basra, etc., are manifestations of variability within a single language or of different languages. The French-speakers are particularly proud of the way that the wide geographical manifestations of French, spoken and written, all come under the heading of *La Francophonie*; the converse assumption is held by the many Valencians who point to tiny differences between the Catalan speech of Valencia and Barcelona in order to claim that Valencian speech is not a kind of Catalan but a separate language deserving a different name (*Valencian*).

This dilemma is a general one, but it is acutely relevant to the study of the development of Romance from Latin. At one end of the cline of possible perspectives, the native speakers of Late Latin (which we might prefer to call *Early Romance*) saw their language as *lingua latina* until the time of the emergence of the first texts in a new Romance scripta, and even later; from the opposite viewpoint, some of the

modern scholars who have laboriously reconstructed their «Proto-Romance» (on the analogy of «Proto»-Indo-European) date the separation of geographically different Romance languages to roughly a thousand years earlier than the first «Romance texts» (see e.g. De Dardel 1996).

On the one hand, the speakers of the period between the Western Roman Empire and the Carolingians (c. 400-800 A.D.) knew their circumstances better than we do. Undoubtedly, Early Romance varied substantially from place to place. Yet they could travel round the Romance world and make themselves understood, and chat with their hosts on these journeys, and this would have reinforced the idea that they all spoke the same language (cp. Wright 2003: ch.12). Unlike the early speakers of Indo-European, the Early Romance communities stayed in touch with each other and shared a common standard written mode, which plays a role in maintaining a monolingual consciousness in most literate communities; and modern scholarship leaves us in no doubt, that even those of the Early Romance Middle Ages were still literate communities (see e.g. Everett 2003) in the sense that there was a reading public, that the illiterate could understand texts that were read aloud, and that society functioned on a basis of documentation. There seems to have been no need for, and no textual reference to, inter-Romance translators in the wide Romance-speaking world until the twelfth or early thirteenth century. From a modern perspective, they may have been wrong to think that they still all spoke the same language, Latin (as Herman 1991/96 suggested), but this is certainly what they believed themselves. Such explicit evidence provided by native speakers in surviving texts is impossible to ignore if we are considering the sociolinguistic and metalinguistic aspects of this question; and despite the general validity of the sociolinguistic principle of uniformity, different societies have different social and political circumstances which may be crucial in the discussion of points such as these. As Tore Janson (2002) points out, politics often plays a central role in these decisions.

On the other hand, those contemporary scholars who thought and wrote about language had some decidedly peculiar ideas, which we are effectively «forced» to discount. Saint Isidore of Seville (who died in 636 A.D.) was hard-working, intelligent, perceptive, well-informed, and with literally encyclopaedic knowledge, but some of the etymologies he adduces in his enormous work entitled *Etymologiae* are breath-takingly improbable pieces of guesswork, unconvincing to a modern reader even by the standards of synchronic popular etymologies (Oroz Reta 1982). The great Grammarians such as Varro, Quintilian, Aulus Gellius, Velius Longus, Aelius Donatus, Priscian, Cassiodorus, Bede, etc., were acute and accurate observers of the written language, but their occasional comments on speech can be bewildering (see Allen 1970); did they really think that Latin had once had a pitch accent? Were they genuinely unable to understand the basic difference between a sound and a letter? Did they never notice the existence of voicing? The answer to each of these more specifically linguistic questions seems to be «yes», and in these cases the modern linguist feels entitled to feel that we know better now.

The question seems to be this, then; if we want to decide whether the speakers of modern multivariable Chinese, modern multivariable English, the modern multivariable French of *la Francophonie* and eleventh-century multivariable

Romance were right in their belief that theirs is or was a single unfragmented monolingual speech community, we need first to decide whether this decision comes into the category of a sociolinguistic matter or a linguistic one. Larry Trask takes the latter view, as we see in his assessment of Chinese as «about seven» languages. I would prefer to propose that it is a sociolinguistic and even political question; that in such a case the views of the modern Chinese, French and English speakers and the Romance-speakers of the eleventh century should have precedence. As regards the latter, indeed, we could follow the analogy of the modern French-speaking communities and coin the noun phrase *La Romanophonie*, available to refer to the single multivariable widespread Romance-speaking community that preceded the undoubted fragmentations of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

2. Fragmentation and Proto-Indo-European

Historical Linguistics developed out of the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European on a comparative basis, a method which was remarkably successful in that context. Although many details are still unclear, and the intermediate language groupings which intervened between a single reconstructable Proto-Indo-European (of about 4000 B.C.) and the attested separate Indo-European language families (from about 1650 B.C. onwards) are still controversial and under investigation (e.g. by Justus and McWhirter 2000), scholars undoubtedly understand it far better now than a century ago. This success, however, brought with it the danger that analysts might assume unnecessarily that every case of linguistic change and divergence would be like that of Proto-Indo-European. There is no doubt that Proto-Indo-European, however similar or dissimilar it was in real life to the modern reconstructions, has fragmented into several languages, and that it had already done so by the time of the first historical written records created by speakers of daughter languages. But it is a very special case, and not just because we know so much more about it than the pre-history of Bantu, Athabaskan or New Guinean languages.

It is certainly quite unlike the Romance case. The speakers of Proto-Indo-European were in small communities separated from each other by very wide distances, quite possibly only in occasional contact with speakers of related dialects, if ever. The speech community as a whole started in a comparatively small area (probably near the Caucasus, although this location is highly controversial and of no significance for the present argument) and then covered increasingly large tracts of land as the speakers spread to the Northern Isles of Orkney and Shetland in one direction and to the Indian sub-continent and beyond in the other, the extension which was to lead to the modern choice of *Indo-European* as their collective language name; presumably nobody used anything like that phrase at the time, and possibly they had no language names in the early period at all. The period of time over which the divergence of Proto-Indo-European continued and deepened into the stage of fragmentation was extremely long. The numbers of speakers were also increasing over the period as a whole. They had no collective written tradition to provide an appearance of unity to the literate, and to the illiterate who encountered any documentation, since none had yet been invented; and in due course when

writing was introduced into these communities, the writing systems were different in different places. Even if they once had, eventually they did not all share the same religious or other oral traditions to provide a sense of cultural community when groups speaking cognate dialects did meet. The fragmentation represented by the traditional tree-diagrams of the Indo-European languages, in short, is unsurprising given the historical and cultural context.

These conditions did not apply in the Romance world which followed the political end of the Roman Empire. It is for this reason that De Dardel's proud claim to have recreated Proto-Romance by following the comparative method developed in order to reconstruct Proto-Indo-European is probably misguided. Historical and philological evidence is abundantly accessible in this case, and cannot just be ignored. We can see from this that in many respects the culture remained essentially the same as it had been in the fourth century, even though political fragmentation ensued. Romance speakers were in constant contact with each other; it is a myth that few people travelled in the Early Middle Ages. Travel was slow, but often undertaken by soldiers, merchants, artisans, scholars, preachers and many others; these constant contacts reinforced the existence of the dialect continuum and led to the continued absence of clear geographical borders between Romance communities which we can still see today (see Penny 2000). The extent of Romance speech came to be less than the extent of Latin speech had been in 400 A.D.; Britain, much of Germany and the Low Countries in the Fifth Century, the Eastern half of the Empire during the Sixth, and North Africa after the Moslem expansion of the Seventh, all slipped from the realms of native Latin/Romance speech, such that the Romance-speaking area of 1000 A.D. was considerably smaller than it had been in 400. Society was still organized on a basis of documentation, and education in basic literacy was still available in the Church. For it is merely another myth that the Early Middle Ages were illiterate, at least in Romance lands; the amount of surviving written material from the period 400 to 800 is large, larger certainly than survives from the preceding four centuries, and the documentation that has not survived for us to see could have been anything up to a thousand times as much in quantity. The existence of a single written mode, taught to and learnt by apprentice scribes in the whole Romance area, can only have reinforced the perception that there was just one language; for it is not natural to believe that one written form can represent more than one spoken language. Thus Isidore of Seville was aware of some details of geographical variation and diachronic developments (often referring to the usages of the *antiqui*, as contrasted with the present-day speakers including himself), but gives no hint of perceiving the contemporary co-existence of more than one language deriving from the Latin of the Empire. He contrasts Latin with Greek and Hebrew, but does not contrast Latin with Romance nor different Latin or Romance languages of his own time with each other; at most, he contrasts the way the same language is produced in different places. He perceived natural variation, not fragmentation.

It seems likely that the later stages of the Roman Empire saw rather less distinctive geographical variation than had existed earlier, as a result of some convergence; this is broadly the view of József Herman (1990, 2000), although Adams (2003) is less sure. Herman's epigraphic evidence seems to suggest that

although different areas of the Empire show signs of initiating different linguistic changes at different times, many of these spread to become common in most areas rather than remaining confined to their area of origin. There are reasons for this, several of which continued to be relevant long after 410: the influence of pre-Roman languages was decreasing, since many had died out; the peculiarities of first-generation learners of Latin, who were e.g. native Punic speakers, largely disappeared as most of their descendants, even if still bilingual, were no longer second-language learners of Latin; speakers from different areas regularly met and interacted, notably in the army, where dialectal accommodation was probably a normal fact of life; the existence of the same traditional high style standard and written mode acted as a magnet for style shifting in any geographical area, working as an aid to uniformity and against divergence (although not necessarily in favour of archaism in speech); and Christianity played a strong role as a unifying force, as liturgical practices and texts came to be established (well studied recently by Banniard 2001). As several of the more outlying Latin-speaking areas lost their Latin speech to other languages, such as Germanic, Greek, and eventually Arabic, the surviving Early Romance nucleus became more self-contained and some of the more idiosyncratic dialectal peculiarities of earlier ages are likely to have disappeared. If this is indeed what happened, it is not surprising, and is paralleled by developments of a similar kind in Modern English and Spanish, whose diatopic variability, although large, may be lessening, particularly in Latin America and in Britain itself.

Greek was spread to a much wider area than Greece by Alexander and his successors, but subsequently the area shrunk; it would be hard to measure this, but Greek dialectal diversity may well be less now than it was three thousand years ago. It is certainly one language still, despite the historical contrasts between *katharevousa* and *demotic*; divergence has not become fragmentation (see Janson 2002: ch.4). Ancient Egyptian remained a single language, perhaps with an unusually small amount of both diatopic variation and diachronic change, for over three thousand years until the period when modern scholars (but not the speakers of the time) alter its name to Coptic to reflect the change in the alphabet used; which even then did not fragment. Unlike earlier Proto-Indo-European, Greek is spoken in roughly the same area now as it was three thousand years ago, and Egyptian and Coptic similarly stayed in essentially the same place. We may even perhaps surmise that if the Proto-Indo-European speakers had stayed where they were (and nobody else had borrowed their language, whether to accompany the agricultural revolution or for any other purpose), it would have developed greatly, diverged into several more dialects than previously, but not fragmented.

3. The Fragmentation of «La Romanophonie»

The date at which *La Romanophonie* began to diverge towards the point of fragmentation is likely to have been later than the period we have discussed so far. In a series of studies, which will not be recapitulated here (Wright 1995, 2003), I have argued that Romance speakers experienced mutual intelligibility until even after the period when the earliest texts in Romance *scripta* were prepared. The famous «multilingual» *descort*, a poem prepared by the Provençal troubadour

Raimbaut de Vaqueiras in 1199 (Riquer 1975, II: 840-42; Wright 2005), with its stanzas presented in five separate written modes which we can now identify as Occitan, Italo-Romance, French, Gascon and Hispano-Romance, is sometimes said to attest to the fragmentation of Romance; and yet it depends crucially for its impact on a Romance-listening audience being able to understand all five modes in a live performance (and quite probably off the page as well, if anybody ever read that poem at the time). There is, therefore, in 1200, undoubted divergence, because the separate Romance modes are recognizably different, and indeed the poet has gone out of his way to put distinctive dialectal features in each stanza (such as French diphthongs in the French stanza, and words ending in *-aio* in the Italian stanza); but equally clearly this cannot yet be called a case of fragmentation, since the point of the poem lies in the necessary mutual intelligibility of all concerned. A modern French-speaker could compose a similar poem in five separate dialects from within *La Francophonie*, without that necessarily implying that the five dialects concerned had already fragmented into separate languages.

There was, however, a general perception by 1300 (a hundred years later) that French, Occitan, Catalan, Castilian, Galician, Portuguese, and a number of Italo-Romance dialects which it is hard now to determine, deserved to be thought of as separate languages, with different names, rather than variations of the same one; and as Tore Janson and others have shown, this was largely due to the invention of separate ways of writing Romance in the separate political kingdoms. This is a paradigm case of politics determining metalinguistics. It would perhaps have been feasible for them to continue writing with the traditional Latinate spellings of words, adapting the evolved morphology, syntax and vocabulary to the orthographic system used for Latin words; this had been the normal case in the eleventh century and much of the twelfth in the Iberian Peninsula, for example, as it is in modern English and French (where new turns of speech and new lexical items can be, and usually are, written according to traditional spelling methods); or they could even have adapted themselves to a new but pan-Romance reformed method of writing, although that would inevitably have meant that for most or all speakers the new system was not as isomorphic to speech as a phonetic transcription, given the divergence between the Romance dialects — which is probably what is going to happen to Spanish in a century's time or so, as the several Academies of the different Spanish-speaking countries seem gradually to be coming round to the idea of trying to elaborate a Spanish spelling reform which will be the same in every country (cp. Del Valle and Gabriel-Stheeman 2002); but in the 1200s, it became fashionable, and not only in the Romance world, to write more texts in vernacular and for each political unit to develop its own distinctive mode (although this generalization applies less neatly in Italy than it does further West). This unnecessarily restrictive assumption is still there in the instinctive desire of many modern Spanish autonomous regions to have their own distinctive written mode.

Contiguity of speakers within a determinate geographical area, then, should mean that fragmentation can be avoided. And the converse need not apply, either: in the case of *La Francophonie* it is being successfully avoided even though the speakers concerned are to be found in every continent and occasionally separated by huge oceans. For fragmentation is always seen in geographical terms; it is not

necessarily the case that diatopic variation is greater than the diastratic variation to be found in one place —indeed Lipski (1994) suggests that social variation in most Latin American cities is as noticeable (or more) than the geographical variation between them— but it does seem to be the case that diatopic variation catches the attention of the general public, as well as of linguists and philologists. There may be a subconscious assumption among investigators, not necessarily unjustified, that diatopic variation, divergence and fragmentation are in some sense more normal than the type of diastratic divergence and fragmentation attested in the invention of Classical Arabic as distinct from all kinds of spoken Arabic, Medieval Latin as separate from Medieval Romance, Biblical Hebrew as a distinctive register, or Katharevousa Greek, as artificially and intentionally maintained archaizing forms of the language; but these are special cases that could not have arisen naturally without detailed elaboration by experts, whereas geographical fragmentation seems to be normal if the communities concerned lose touch with each other for long periods, as happened with Proto-Indo-European but has hardly ever happened since to the successor Indo-European languages. Fragmentation catalysed by the rise of separate writing systems, as in the Romance case (Janson 2002: ch. 5-6, Wright 2003), has similarly been precipitated by the deliberate intervention of language planning, rather than just happening naturally.

4. The «Locus» of Change

It is thus worth considering why fragmentation is not the default case, despite the implications of the tree diagrams; and what this implies for our general assessment of the nature of both language and language change. This phenomenon, of fragmentation only occurring naturally if communities are genuinely physically separated, seems to be an argument for locating language, and thus language change, in the individual brain. This comment is not intended to imply that individuals can learn a language in a social vacuum; we learn vocabulary, phonology, morphology and syntax from our interlocutors, our peers and our family. We could not learn it without being in such a social group. It is because speakers are talking and listening to others that a speech community can maintain its coherence in the first place, and will usually remain a monolingual whole despite such divergences as are bound to arise; but despite the necessary social aspects of language, each individual has separately internalized the relevant rules and data in their brain. Internally strong social networks of speakers will thus necessarily show less variation than randomly collected groups of people, but variation remains possible there too because even though we all speak the same language we do not all share the same brain, and will not have had exactly the same experiences. This might appear obvious, and would perhaps hardly seem worth saying, except that there are linguists who locate language in «society» in some mystical Platonic or Wittgenstinian way (see the presentation in Mackenzie 1997: 3-16), sometimes rejecting the idea of locating language in the brain largely on the grounds that this is a Chomskyan attitude. Well, it is indeed that, but being a Chomskyan view does not necessarily entail being an erroneous view, and there is no reason to avoid taking this view even if (like myself) we are sceptical of several other ideas proposed by Chomsky.

From a diachronic perspective, this question ties in with what Trask describes as the problem of the *locus of diachronic process*; in his *Dictionary of Historical and Comparative Linguistics* (Trask 2000: 201) this is explained as being «the object that changes during language change. There has been much discussion of whether this object is speakers' mental grammars, speakers' social behaviour, the language independent of its speakers, or something else». The first two of these alternatives are probably both essentially right. The third of these, advocated by Lass (1997) among others, seems to many an all but incomprehensible suggestion, even if the modern analyst has no access to the speakers (as specialists in Proto-Indo-European have not); when we study a language of the distant past we necessarily have to study it «independent of its speakers» in most cases, because the context of the production of the evidence is not available to us; but if we can reconstruct any such information (by sociophilological means or others), then we should do so, for even in the distant past every text has had a context, every language state of the past can be studied now only because it had once had native speakers, and when it existed it was located in their brains. And it is worth stressing that we do literally mean the brain here, even if some analysts might prefer to rephrase that as the language being in speakers' minds; there seems to be enough evidence now (e.g. as handily summarized in the third edition of Jean Aitchison's *Words in the Mind*, 2003) that different parts of the brain hold specific different linguistic data and abilities, not necessarily identical in different speakers.

In a recent study (Wright 2003: chapter 24) I argued that what changes during the course of a «sound change» is not the language itself, or we would be speaking a different language every year; variability is inherent in a language, and a new variant can be housed comfortably within the same language without the language thereby having changed its identity. Such a change is not, despite the common nomenclature of a «sound change», a change in phonetics, since [t] is always [t] even if some words that once contained [t] have now come to have a voiced [d] instead. What has actually changed during a so-called «sound change» is the lexical entry of the relevant words in each individual speaker's brain. It seems logical to propose that semantic changes operate in the same way too; and lexical changes, the acquisition of new words, could hardly operate otherwise. This conclusion requires us to believe that we all have such an entry for each of the words we know, a view which seems like common sense to non-linguists and increasingly to linguists as well. This placing of the «locus of diachronic process» in the mind of each individual helps explain why divergence can arise at all, and how it is in no sense pathological or even undesirable, since there is no compulsion for us all to change our entries at the same time as each other, and it is normal for old and new pronunciations of a word to co-exist in a community for many years; it also helps explain the widely attested phenomenon of the lexical diffusion of sound changes, which seems now to be established as a genuine phenomenon which it is at last respectable to mention in Historical Linguistics, even though there is still discussion over whether it is the normal default case or not. The subsequent spread of the innovative lexical entries to more people's brains than those that originate them (either because individuals actually have their entries change, or because new generations arise who have never internalized the preceding ones) is the result of

sociolinguistic mechanisms such as those which have been studied to such effect by James Milroy (e.g. Milroy 1992), but in the case of sound changes, meaning changes and vocabulary changes (all of them being changes in lexical entries) the innovation can only be individually located. Morphological and syntactic change is a less complex phenomenon altogether, but what Trask refers to as «speakers' mental grammars» are highly likely to be the locus of change in these cases too.

This explains why an increase in social contiguity between mutually intelligible speakers leads to convergence, sometimes initially as mere contingent accommodation, or, if it becomes internalized subsequently, as «koineization» (recently examined in an excellent account of the development of Medieval Spanish by Tuten 2003) or the development of an interdialect (e.g. Trudgill 1986); and it also explains the phenomenon which remains to be explained after the foregoing analysis, of when and how divergence can become fragmentation. If a variant arises in a speaker's speech usage, it will either be corroborated or rejected generally as a result of that speaker's interactions with other speakers. But if there are other speakers of the same language who are out of reach, and never hear the innovation, and the speaker in question never hears their reactions, then that change will not be able to eventuate there and a step towards divergence and possible fragmentation has been taken. Whereas if the language were genuinely independent of its speakers, this sequence of events could not apply.

5. Conclusion

It is not the language that changes, but each speaker's internalized knowledge of that language. This development can be intentional, but usually is not. There can be thus no predetermined path along which a language is due to change; the phenomena adduced by the proponents of typology and drift as mechanisms of change involve at most interesting summaries of developments, but can be seen in no way as predictive or even explanatory (even in a study as intelligent as that of Elvira 1998 for Spanish). The common-sense instinct that sees geographical diatopic fragmentation as normal if parts of a speech community are separated from each other has a real point, but it needs to be accepted that it is counter-evidence to the idea that language is not located in the brain, or the related idea that a language has an identity separate from its existence in the brains of those who speak it. The facts of variation suggest that divergence is normal, because we do not all have the same brain; the facts of fragmentation, as in tree diagrams, suggest that this is abnormal, unless the communities concerned have been out of contact for some time, or, as in the Romance case, political factors have self-consciously intervened in a state of complex monolingualism order to lead to a language being written in different ways in different places. Either way, in order to understand what has happened we need to know as much as possible about the social circumstances of the speakers, the metalinguistic attitudes and professional training of the scribes who write our documentary evidence, and the authors who provide their material; that is to say, socio-political history needs to be presented where it is available to us, as well as accurate maps where possible, and detailed philological information if there is any. Thus the old-fashioned philological syllabus, which combined linguistic study of

the past with an understanding of historical and social aspects of the time concerned, turns out to have been intelligently prepared, and deserves respect even from historical linguists investigating languages with no written tradition. And fragmentation, where it has definitely happened, can be used by the specialists in prehistory as evidence for the geographical and cultural separation of the relevant groups, while, conversely, datable shared innovations can probably be taken to imply that such separation has not happened yet.

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