

FOREWORD/PRESENTACIÓN

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The Editorial Committee of the journal *Veleia* decided to dedicate the 2016 special dossier to commemorating the second centenary of the publication of Franz Bopp's work, *Über das Conjugationssystem der Sanskritsprache in Vergleichung mit jedem der griechischen, lateinischen, persischen und germanischen Sprache*¹ (Frankfurt a. M.: Andreäische Buchhandlung), commonly considered the foundational work of comparative linguistics as a scientific discipline and of Indo-European linguistics as its concrete form as regards an academic discipline. Having received the assignment to prepare the dossier, we three editors focused on its general features, agreeing on themes which would be interesting to address within the limits allowed by the Journal, as well as the authors most suited to carrying this out. We wanted to combine several aspects at the same time. On the one hand was the obvious commemorative nature of the plan, for which it was appropriate to allocate one contribution to commenting on the figure of Franz Bopp himself and evaluating his contribution to the creation of comparative linguistics taking into account the scientific context of the time. On the other hand, however, we did not want the dossier to be exclusively historiographical, but instead we thought that the commemoration offered a good opportunity to reflect on several aspects, both theoretical and practical, of the discipline through its two-hundred-year lifespan. We prepared the content according to a twin focus: some contributions would concentrate on demonstrating both the most significant achievements realised by Indo-European linguistics in this period and the most important problems it confronts today, specifically addressing certain particular aspects such as morphology and grammaticalization, synthetic reconstruction and the vision of the Indo-European family and its dialectical relations, with special attention paid to Anatolian. We also thought that it would be appropriate to offer a general presentation of the achievements realised by comparative linguistics in other linguistic families. An obvious case was provided by the work on Amerindian languages, which are diametrically opposed to the Indo-European languages as regards their documented tradition but which, thanks to the works of Leonard Bloomfield on the reconstruction of Proto-Algonquian, implied a benchmark in order to validate the universal application of the comparative method.

Choosing the authors to be assigned with the contributions was an easy task: they would be specialists of international standing in their respective fields of research, and if possible they would have had some prior academic relationship with our institution. As such, in order to comment on

¹ 'On the conjugational system of the Sanskrit language in comparison with that of the Greek, Latin, Persian and Germanic language'.

the figure of Bopp and his work we thought of Pierre Swiggers (Catholic University of Louvain), who already contributed to the proceedings of the Third Conference of the Luis Michelena Chair with a historiographical work on historical-comparative linguistics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.² In order to address the extensive Amerindian world we thought of Lyle Campbell (University of Hawaii, Mānoa), who collaborated in both the Master's and Doctoral programmes at the University of the Basque Country, and who moreover contributed to the Second Conference of the Michelena Chair with a work on the concept of genetically isolated language and its application to the Basque case.³ Campbell is not just one of the most important specialists on such families, but his contributions of a theoretical and methodological nature have been very influential. We thought, too, that Brian Joseph (Ohio State University), like Campbell the author of an extremely well-known and splendid manual on historical linguistics, and who, in the same way as the already mentioned professors, had also given a seminar on the Balkan linguistic area in our postgraduate programmes, could contribute with a reflection on the situation of historical-comparative linguistics within the context of linguistic studies in general.

As regards the specific topics in Indo-European linguistics which were envisaged exploring, we thought that our colleague from the University of Barcelona Ignasi-Xavier Adiego was the ideal person to take care of the always fascinating topic of the position of Anatolian within the Indo-European family and its evaluation for the reconstruction of the protolanguage, bearing in mind his crucial contributions to improving understanding of the smaller Anatolian languages in the first millennium B.C. and especially Carian. We also initially intended to enlist the help of our faculty colleague José Luis Melena, a major specialist in Mycenaean philology, in undertaking a contribution which would highlight the advantages of a close relationship between Indo-European linguistics and text philology, which is clearly exemplified in the long and laborious process of interpreting Mycenaean tablets. When prof. Melena declined our invitation for personal reasons, the assignment was transferred to José Luis García Ramón, emeritus professor of Indo-European Linguistics at the University of Cologne and a major expert in Greek and Sanskrit texts. We wanted to take advantage of the occasion of publishing this dossier to touch on two aspects which have received a lot of attention on the part of linguists in recent decades: in first place, the advances in comparative and historical syntax in general and in the field of Indo-European languages in particular, bearing in mind that this has traditionally been one of the least developed fields due to the theoretical and practical difficulties entailed in establishing syntactic cognates; and in second place, a new and fresh reading of Bopp and of comparative Indo-European linguistics, especially that which affects reconstruction and morphological evolution, from the point of view of the theory of grammaticalization. For the former topic we have counted on the contribution of Thórhallur Eythórsson (University of Iceland) and Jóhanna Barðdal (University of Gent), who offer in their article a brief and clear description of the application of so-called Construction Grammar to syntactic reconstruction in the prehistory of Indo-European languages. For the latter topic, we could think of no-one more qualified than Christian Lehmann (University of Erfurt), whose works on grammaticalization for thirty years are an unavoidable reference point. We received enthusiastic responses from all of the abovementioned people. We would like to thank everyone for their availa-

² Pierre SWIGGERS, «Aspectos del desarrollo de la lingüística histórica en los siglos XIX y XX», in R. Gómez, J. Gorrochategui, J.A. Lakarra & C. Mounole (eds.), *3rd Conference of the Luis Michelena Chair*, Vitoria-Gasteiz 2013, 467-509.

³ Lyle CAMPBELL, «La investigación histórica de las lenguas aisladas, ¿es raro el vasco?», in J. A. Lakarra, J. Gorrochategui & B. Urgell (eds.), *2nd Conference of the Luis Michelena Chair*, Vitoria-Gasteiz 2011, 23-40.

bility for the project, and especially to the authors who have sent us manuscripts for their valuable contribution to the realisation of this dossier.

Franz Bopp's *Conjugationssystem* is generally taken to be the foundational work in historical and comparative linguistics, or, put more precisely and perhaps less widely, comparative grammar. And although in the founding of this new discipline the contributions of Rasmus Rask or Jacob Grimm, contemporary to or shortly after Bopp's initial work, were also crucially important, there is no doubt that the impact of this work, complemented throughout his academic career by subsequent investigations which culminated in his successful *Vergleichende Grammatik*, was enormous.

All of a sudden, a field of study with completely unexpected consequences opened up in front of scholars, which not only affected the mere establishment of a linguistic family, or the inferences which that might have for the evolution of languages themselves, both in a concrete sense and in their theoretical implications, but which considerably extended the historical horizon of humanity, projecting an illuminating light on the relations that diverse peoples in Eurasia had during the long and obscure period of prehistory. In spite of some prejudices of the time about the pre-eminence of certain languages with respect to others, of the non-clear separation between comparison and typology, of the naivety in believing in the recovery of original states of languages and of other defects of a methodological nature which nineteenth-century linguistic research gradually and fittingly resolved, the basic idea of comparing discreet grammatical elements amongst various languages, and not just that of lexical words, had, quite simply, a strong explanatory power. Comparison was useful not just to get some general idea of the linguistic features of a family, but also as a means of understanding better both the structure and the history of each of the languages in that family. An eminently descriptive task such as establishing mutually comparable segments or cognates had clear consequences for the diachronic consideration of these languages, which had an effect that went both upwards, in the suggestion of a protolanguage, and downwards, in determining the changes experienced by each of the languages. "Comparative" linguistics would increasingly become "historical", thereby establishing, in another sense, clear boundaries and methodological differences with linguistic typology. This was so much the case, indeed, that a born comparativist like Antoine Meillet could write (1925, 11), in relation to Basque, in a no doubt exaggerated way, "tant qu'une langue est isolée, elle est dénuée d'histoire".

Throughout these last two hundred years, since the publication of Franz Bopp's pioneering work, comparative linguistics has never ceased developing, extending its object of study to all the world's languages, achieving definitive results in linguistic classification for many language families. Meanwhile, during this same period comparative linguistics has been considered from different perspectives and interests, from the detailed study of phonetic change with the Neogrammarians to grammaticalization processes in more recent times, via studies on dialectalization and subgrouping as well as areal diffusion. As was to be expected, each of these interests has been renewed periodically by advances in other disciplines, whether linguistic or not, with which comparative linguistics has entered into dialogue; thus, the *vexata quaestio* of the unexceptional nature of phonetic change has in large measure been clarified by sociolinguistic studies on change in progress, and new typological studies, developed out of the empirical comparison of hundreds of languages, serve as a guide in the tasks of linguistic reconstruction.

After some years of decline in the development of the discipline, especially after the Second World War, in part due to a kind of stagnation and routine in its practice and in part as a consequence of the almost exclusive promotion of descriptive or synchronic linguistics, to use one of the terms in the Saussurean binomial, one might say that historical-comparative linguistics has wit-

nessed, from the 1990s onwards and especially in the last decade or so, a considerable revitalization. One only need observe the proliferation of introductory manuals, monographs and scientific articles on historical linguistics, the creation of specialised journals and the increasing presence of the discipline in both undergraduate and postgraduate university degrees.

Comparative linguistics has also elicited the interest of other historical disciplines, especially those of population genetics and archaeology, with the aim of examining in detail diverse human groups in both history and prehistory. Although we know today that the initial comparisons made between classifications of human populations and linguistic families, along the lines of Cavalli-Sforza, lacked, due to their superficial nature, the necessary rigour, it is clear that an interesting field for collaboration has been opened up. A secondary and clearly promising effect derived from the dialogue with evolutionary biology is an interest in the means of formalisation when it comes to creating cladograms or phylogenetic trees for the languages in a family. A notion proper to comparative linguistics, at least since Schleicher, as is the idea of speciation or the emergence of independent languages from a common original ancestor, refined throughout the practice of the discipline with fundamental concepts like ‘shared innovation’, ‘parallel innovation’, or ‘retention’—basically the same notions as ‘(syn-)apomorphy’ or ‘(sym-)plesiomorphy’ which biology would begin to employ systematically later—may receive considerable help in both methodological suggestions and the use of certain computer programmes which evolutionary biology has put into practice.

The fact that interest in comparative linguistics is fashionable has also had unfortunate results in the form of erroneous arguments which involve establishing new linguistic families or protolanguages on what is, in actuality, a feeble comparative basis. Occasionally these are proposals by linguists who, coming from different research fields, have been attracted by linguistic comparison due probably to its great explanatory capacity, but who lack the indispensable understanding of the methodological limits, an understanding which only prolonged involvement in the discipline confers. As the great and recently deceased Indo-Europeanist Calvert Watkins said, citing the words of Yakov Malkiel, any practitioner of etymology, linguistic comparison and reconstruction must combine certain personal and professional virtues such as “1) an inventive mind, producing the felicitous association of isolated facts; 2) finesse in marshalling phonology, grammar, and semantics; 3) a combination of erudition and delicacy in handling language and culture”, to which one should add a fourth ability which consists of a “4) a flair for when to stop” (Watkins 1990, 300).

In the first contribution Pierre Swiggers presents, with a depth of data and documented precision, the academic life of Franz Bopp, his training as a sanskritist and his contribution to establishing comparative linguistics in the scientific context of his era. It is very difficult to talk about Bopp and evaluate his work in only a few words, bearing in mind the numerous and excellent evaluations that nineteenth- and twentieth-century linguists, such as Berthold Delbrück, Holger Pedersen and Anna Morpurgo-Davis, have undertaken on his work, but Professor Swiggers has been particularly skilled when it comes to offering not just precise data but also a more personal and intimate appraisal of his figure and work.

Brian Joseph offers us, in his concise contribution, an elegant definition of the central elements making up the comparative method, a specific and concrete form of linguistic comparison, demonstrating the simplicity of its postulates as well as the explanatory power of its results. By means of well-known examples in Indo-European linguistics he illustrates the different methods of reconstruction in phonology, morphology and lexicon, together with the synchronic and diachronic rules of the protolanguage, concluding, by way of tribute to Calvert Watkins, with interesting notes on the reconstruction of cultural vocabulary.

Ignasi-Xavier Adiego addresses one of the most interesting and hotly debated points in Indo-European linguistics during the twentieth century, the Anatolian question; that is, the impact that the discovery of new languages in the family, such as Hittite and Luwian dating from the second millennium B.C. and other languages in the same Anatolian family with less extensive testimonies dating from the first millennium B.C, implied for the structure of that family, the conception of protolanguage and the specific position of each language in the phylogenetic tree. Following a succinct and clear historical presentation of the discoveries and the challenge implied for the Indo-European vision expressed in the monumental work by Karl Brugmann and Berthold Delbrück, Adiego begins an evaluation of the arguments both for and against an Indo-Hittite ancestor prior to the innovations of classic Indo-European and responsible for archaisms in Anatolian, highlighting the lack of consistency in certain classic arguments as well as the need to count on new material originating in Anatolian languages dating from the first millennium B.C., making of all this a model application of dialectal subgrouping methods.

The work by Thorhallur Eythórsson and Johanna Barðdal offers a brief but detailed review of contributions in the field of syntactic reconstruction, both in specific aspects of Indo-European languages and in general methodological aspects, from Bopp's times to the present day, a moment at which they establish three general tendencies. One follows the tradition of Indo-European linguistics, another is framed within generative grammar and the last is Construction Grammar. It is within this last school of linguistic thought that Eythórsson and Barðdal have proposed a long series of contributions towards reconstructing syntactic aspects of the Germanic and Indo-European family which are cited in certain detail in the second part of their work. On the basis of these results, the authors state and defend a clearly positive stance with respect to the very possibilities of carrying out the reconstruction of syntactic aspects of protolanguages.

Also in the field of morphosyntactic reconstruction, but from what the previous scholars would surely dub the traditional methodology, José Luis García Ramón reviews Franz Bopp's comments and opinions about the Indo-European reconstruction of infinitives from the viewpoint of the recent advances in this specific topic.

In order to be able to speak about the notion of grammaticalization in the work of Franz Bopp, Christian Lehmann first offers a description of the cultural, intellectual and scientific environment of the era in which he developed his work as a way of understanding its value and its limitations. Following this introductory section, Lehmann cites previous or contemporary authors to Bopp who could be considered precursors of the —to date— ubiquitous notion of grammaticalization and reviews some ideas in the *Conjugationssystem* in which a limited notion of grammaticalization can clearly be detected. In some cases, these assumptions are not accepted today, but there are other ideas expressed by this scholar which form part of the common heritage of historical linguistics.

Finally, Lyle Campbell offers a state of the art as regards the genetic classification of the languages of Mesoamerica, a cultural and linguistic area which runs from northern Mexico to Nicaragua. This classification includes seven families (Mayan, Mixe-Zoquean, Tequistlatecan, Totonacan (Totonac-Tepehua), Otomanguean, Uto-Aztecan and Xinkan) and three isolated languages (Cuitlatec, Huave and Tarascan (Purépecha)) and represents the result of two centuries of work and scientific debate. Campbell offers a list of the languages included in each family and establishes the criteria for comparison, the most notable results in the fields of phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical reconstruction and, in some cases, the degrees of credibility of the arguments proposed by different experts.

Although this small collection of works remains far from offering a wide panorama of comparative linguistics in all its facets and, above all, linguistic families and languages in which it is currently applied, it does offer a significant and highly informative vision for the general public and for linguists from other branches of the discipline, but also for specialists interested in understanding, from authors of great renown, innovative new aspects and original opinions in a respected and always rewarding discipline such as historical and comparative linguistics.