Folk etymology and contamination in the Romance languages

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Summary
'Folk etymology' and 'contamination' each involve associative formal influences between words which have no 'etymological' (i.e., historical), connexion. From a morphological perspective, in folk etymology a word acquires at least some elements of the structure of some other, historically unrelated, word. The result often looks like a *compound*, of a word composed of other, independently existing, words. These are usually (but not necessarily) 'compounds' lacking in any *semantic* compositionality, which do not 'make sense': e.g., French *beaupré* 'bowsprit', but apparently 'beautiful meadow', possibly derived from English *bowsprit*. Typically involved are relatively long, polysyllabic, words, characteristically belonging to erudite or exotic vocabulary, whose unfamiliarity is accommodated by speakers unfamiliar with the target word through replacement of portions of that word with more familiar words. Contamination differs from folk etymology both on the formal and on the semantic side, usually involving non-morphemic elements, and acting between words which are semantically linked: e.g., Spanish *nuera* 'daughter-in-law', instead of etymologically expected ******nora*, apparently influenced by the vowel historically underlying *suegra* 'mother-in-law'. While there is nothing uniquely Romance about these phenomena, Romance languages abound in them.

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1. The concepts

The phenomena labelled 'folk etymology' (Fr. 'étymologie populaire' and similar terms in other Romance languages; henceforth FE) and 'contamination' have long occupied an undeservedly marginal place in historical linguistics, and certainly in histories of the Romance languages. These two terms will be retained here because they are sanctioned by long-established usage, but they are misleading. 'Folk etymology' has little to do with 'etymology' understood as the 'study of the historical origin of words', while 'contamination' bears inappropriately pejorative connotations, evocative even of disease. The term 'folk' (or 'popular') may have a rather condescending ring (see Béguelin 2007), implying a difference between erudite etymology, as practised by academic linguists, and the structural and semantic reanalyses spontaneously produced by ordinary people ('folk'). 'Folk etymology' can, indeed, involve strange and even comical results, displaying speakers' ignorance of the historically correct structure and origin of the words affected, and provoking the rather common academic treatment of such developments as 'aberrant', 'amusing', 'grotesque', 'reprehensible' (see Orr 1963:1). A perhaps better, but less commonly used, term for *FE* is 'paronymic attraction' (cf. Dauzat 1946:109), or 'paronomasia', correctly suggesting structural interference between words synchronically co-present in the lexicon. A further factor in the perception of these phenomena as marginal, is their erratic, idiosyncratic, and unpredictable nature, which often sees them relegated to appendices in histories of individual languages and language-families (cf. Béguelin 2007:20). None the less, the historical analysis of the Romance languages, and perhaps especially of French, has yielded a significant portion of the examples of *FE* and of contamination to be found in the general linguistic literature.

2. Folk etymology

The class of phenomena defined in the historical linguistic literature as 'folk etymology', and as 'contamination' has in common that its members involve associative influences between words

which normally have no historical 'etymological' connexion. There is always some kind of semantic connexion in synchrony underlying 'contamination', but we shall see that this is not necessarily, or even normally, true for *FE*. Our focus here is on changes in the *form* of words which can be ascribed neither to sound change nor to 'analogy', at least if we understand by the latter the replication of existing patterns of correspondence between form and meaning. It needs to be recognized, however, that there are phenomena which deserve the label 'folk etymology', but involve semantic (rather than formal) changes, prompted by perceived connexions between the form of one word and that of some other word of different meaning. French *péage* [peaʒ] 'toll, turnpike, place where one pays to use a road' is a derived word formed from continuants of Latin PES, PEDIS 'foot' and of the derivational suffix -ATICUM. Historically, the word has to do with 'feet', not 'payment'. Yet an accidental phonological resemblance, and a clear semantic connexion, reportedly (cf. Orr 1963:1f.;6) lead many French speakers to discern in *péage* the root of the verb *payer* [peje] 'to pay', ultimately derived from Latin PACARE 'pacify, settle (a price, etc.)'. An example made famous by Jules Gilliéron (e.g., Gilliéron 1918), is the French word *essaim* 'swarm (of bees, etc.)'. Historically, many French dialects had the word *es* 'bee' [ɛs], derived from Latin APIS. Now, *essaim* in fact comes from Latin EXAMEN 'swarm, crowd' (standard French pronunciation [ɛsɛ̃]), in turn historically made up of EX- 'out' and AGMEN 'column, procession, army on the march'. The two words are etymologically unconnected, but the shared element [ɛs] allegedly leads speakers to identify the word for 'bee' in *essaim* (cf. Orr 1963:2f.). A further associative factor is that the remaining portion *-aim* (-[ɛ̃]) is homophonous with a common derivational suffix expressing collective meaning. The word seems to comprise elements which jointly mean 'collection of bees', i.e., 'swarm'. Perceived associations of this kind can, indeed, lead to semantic change. French *imbriqué* 'imbricated', 'overlapping in the manner of tiles, fish scales, etc.', is an adjective ultimately derived from Latin IMBREX 'tile'. Yet it clearly evokes in French the noun *brique* 'brick' (a loanword from Germanic), and there are cases (see Orr 1963:9f.) where the context in which it is used reveals that the word has been taken by speakers to mean something like 'being part of some structure, in the manner of a brick'.

Semantically-based folk etymological reanalyses will not occupy us further here (although it should be noted that for some scholars, e.g., Gilliéron, they seem to have constituted the more important part of *FE*: cf. Lauwers 2002:84n19). In *morphological FE* a word acquires elements of the structure of some other word or words. The result often looks like the creation of a *compound*, of a word composed of other, independently existing, words (or lexical formatives). They are usually (but not necessarily) 'compounds', but ones that lack in any *semantic* compositionality: in short, they do not 'make sense'. Typically involved are relatively long, polysyllabic, words, characteristically belonging to erudite or exotic vocabulary, whose relative unfamiliarity is accommodated by speakers unfamiliar with the target word through replacement of portions of that word with more familiar words. It is quite often assumed (e.g., Pisani 1960:643; Kilani-Schoch 1988:91; Bolinger 1992:29; Pöckl, Rainer, and Pöll 2003:41) that *FE* is a matter of lending 'semantic motivation' to unfamiliar words by replacing portions of them with elements that help 'make sense' of them. Indeed, this does sometimes appear to be the case, but clear Romance examples are truly difficult to find. One might cite: Calabrian *rotamobbuli* lit. 'mobile wheel' (< Italian *automobile*) and also *altomobile* (+ *alto* 'high') in Trieste (Wartburg 1925:18); Romanian (substandard) *incuibație* or *încuibație* 'incubation' (< standard Romanian *incubație* (+ *în* 'in') + *cuib* 'nest'); French *choucroute* (< Alsatian *surchrut* (= German *Sauerkraut*) + *chou* 'cabbage' possibly combined with *croûte* 'crust'); popular Spanish *vagamundo* ‘globetrotter’, lit. 'wander-world' (< *vagabundo* 'vagabond' + *mundo* 'world'). For partial motivation in *FE* see also Coates (1987:323f.). Even in such cases, apparent semantic 'motivation' is not always straightforward. An 'automobile' has 'wheels' but is not 'a wheel', nor is it inherently 'high' (although one might argue that one is higher off the road in it

than one is on foot); 'incubation' may happen 'in nests', but it does not inherently do so, and presumably never does so in the medical or scientific context in which the term is most often used. In reality, such apparently clear cases constitute a minority. The majority of examples of morphological *FE* in Romance languages (and generally: see Maiden 2008) do not motivate words semantically, they do not 'make sense', and indeed in many cases make 'nonsense', sometimes even comical and potentially misleading nonsense (see Baldinger 1973), by introducing elements whose meanings have nothing to do with the word affected.

To take some examples from Italo-Romance (see particularly Alessio 1937/1938; Bertolotti 1958), we could cite the following: Italian *Campidoglio* (a toponym in Rome) < Latin CAPITOLIUM (+ *campi* 'fields' + *d'oglio* 'of oil'); *battisuocera* 'cornflower' < Latin BAPTISECULA (+ *batti* 'beat' + *suocera* 'mother-in-law'); *gelsomino* 'jasmine' < Persian *yasmi:n* (+ *gelso* 'mulberry'); *bergamotto* 'bergamot' < Turkish *beg armudı* (+ *Bergamo* (a toponym) + derivational suffix *-otto*); *bompresso* 'bowsprit' < French *beaupré* (+ *b(u)on* 'good' + *presso* 'near, at'); Arpinate (southern Italo-Romance) *taumaturco* 'silly' < Italian *taumaturgo* 'miracle worker' (+ *turco* 'Turk'); Abruzzese (southern Italo-Romance) kampo'mɔi̯llə 'camomile' < Italian *camomilla* (+ *campo* 'field'); Catanzarese (southern Italo-Romance) *bekkamortu* 'bergamot' < It. *bergamotto* (+ local *bekkamortu* 'gravedigger'); animahju'rita 'hermaphrodite (goat)' < ('krapa) *armahju'rita < Greek HERMAPHRODITES (+ local 'arma 'soul', influenced by Italian *anima* 'soul', + hju'rita 'floral, flowery'); Cosentino para'gustə 'gate to choir stall in a church' < Italian *balaustra* (+ local 'para 'stop, ward off' and 'gustə 'taste').

Romanian (see, e.g., Hristea 1958) has standard *chirpici* 'sun-dried brick of mud, straw and dung' < Turkish *kerpiç*, but also *FE* variants such as *cârpici* (+ *cârpă* 'rag, duster'), *cipici* (+ *cipic* 'type of slipper'), *ciupici* (+ *a ciupi* 'pinch'), *clipici* (+ *a clipi* 'blink, wink') all followed by the common derivational suffix *-ici*. For standard Romanian *filigran* 'filigree', we have *filigram* < *filigran* (+ *-gram*, a common element in technical expressions, such as *telegram* 'telegram'), or *Portocalia* 'Portugal' < *Portugalia* 'Portugal' (+ *portocală* 'orange'). Standard Romanian *pârău* 'stream' (probably a loan from Albanian) frequently becomes *pârâu,* showing the influence of *râu* 'river'. Standard French has some *FE* forms such as *agonir* 'hurl mortal insults' (< *ahonir* 'shame' + *agonie* 'death throe'); *chat-huant* 'tawny owl' < *chouan* (+ *chat* 'cat' + *huant* 'hooting'); *beaupré* (< English *bowsprit* + *beau* 'beautiful' + *pré* 'meadow'). Reported dialectal forms include the dish *cresson à la noix* < *cresson orlenois* (+ *à la noix* 'with nuts', but guaranteed nut-free!); *mouche catholique* < *mouche cantharide* 'Spanish fly' (+ *catholique* 'Catholic'); *courte-pointe, contre-pointe* 'counterpane' < *coute-pointe* (+ *courte* 'short' / *contre* 'against')*; pomme d'amour* 'love apple' (< It. *pomo dei mori* (lit. 'fruit of the Moors') + *amour* 'love'); *diablette* 'diabetes' < (*diabète* + *diable* 'devil').

While *FE* often has the effect of conferring the structure of a compound on to the target words, it can also confer another type of apparent morphological structure on those words, that of word-forms bearing apparent derivational affixes. Examples are rare, but we may cite a series of nouns which in old French happened to end in *-er* -[er], such as *bacheler* 'batchelor', *piler* 'pillar', *souler* 'shoe', *sangler* 'boar', where *-er* was replaced (see, e.g., Meyer-Lübke 1921=1966) by the common agentive suffix *-ier* (yielding modern French *bachelier*, *pilier*, *soulier*, *sanglier*). As argued in Maiden (1999:193), such developments seem to involve the creation of a kind of internal structure for these words, such that a root is followed by a derivational suffix — even though the 'root' has no independent existence outside the target word, and the suffix has no clear derivational function. The replacement of *-er* by *-ier* is, almost certainly, also favoured by the phonological resemblance between the endings.

It should be noted that *FE* effects may be observed at the level of writing as well as, or instead of, in phonology. It is in the nature of folk-etymological forms that they pertain to spoken language and are generally not written unless they find their way into the standard language; but when, for example, *beaupré* 'bowsprit' acquires a written form in French, it is

striking that the mode chosen to represent it orthographically is *beau* and *pré*, the orthographical forms of the words for 'beautiful' and 'meadow'. French offers sundry other ways of representing the phonological sequence [bopʁe] (***bauprai*, ***bopret*, ***beauprer* and others), but standard French has settled on the spelling *beaupré*, giving the word an orthographically transparent, yet nonsensical, internal structure. As for the word *diablette* for *diabète* 'diabetes', cited by Orr (1963), while *diabl-* is clearly the word *diable* 'devil', whose presence in *diablette* may well be motivated by the fact that the disease is perceived as an evil, the final portion *-ette* -[ɛt] remains phonologically but not orthographically identical to the final portion of *diabète*. The decision to spell *-ette* rather than *-ète* in *diablette* is itself a manifestation of folk etymology, since the ending of the original has been replaced with the orthographic form of an exactly homophonous French (feminine) diminutive suffix *-ette*, and this occurs in the absence of any apparent diminutive meaning.

As many of these examples show, *FE* rarely 'makes sense' at all, and indeed its effect is very often to 'make nonsense'. So much so that, for example, Alessio (1937/38:359) is led to comment on 'the people's need to associate words which are partly homophonous, even if they mean something quite different'. Initially, the affected word simply displays an arbitrary relation between *signans* and *signatum*, while under the effects of *FE* it is liable to suggest meanings that range from irrelevant or misleading to downright contrary to sense. Some examples are Italian *battisuocera* 'cornflower' (but literally 'beat mother-in-law') or dialectal para'gustə 'gate to choir stall' (but literally 'stop taste'). Usually the result is a completely new 'compound', but Catanzarese bekka'mortu for Italian *bergamotto* deploys an existing compound meaning 'gravedigger' (literally, 'catch dead person'). French *beaupré* 'bowsprit' appears (especially in its written form) to comprise the two words 'beautiful' and 'meadow': quite evidently, the referent is not inherently 'beautiful', and by no stretch of the imagination a 'meadow'. Of course, some caution, and a degree of humility, is always in order from linguists: one needs to be careful, in any given case, that the selection of some replacing element is not prompted by an association which genuinely exists in the minds of speakers but may be unknown to the non-native-speaker linguist. While *FE* typically involves the replacement of parts of long polysyllabic words by other words, it is possible to have complete folk-etymological replacement of one word by another, and this seems especially likely to happen with shorter words. A case in point, described by Hristea (1968:243), involves Romanian *gaz metal* literally 'gas metal', for *gaz metan* 'methane gas': clearly a 'gas' is not 'metal'. Remaining with 'gas', Wartburg (1925:18) reports for Loches (France) that *acétylène* 'acetylene (gas)' is replaced by the phrase *la sainte-hélène*, literally 'the Saint Helen'. This last example, by the way, suggests that folk-etymological reanalysis may involve not merely parts of words, or even whole words, but even, in principle, lexicalized multi-word phrases, such as the name of a saint. By the way, and as Loporcaro (2014:173) observes, the deployment of proper names in folk etymological creations — for example the case of Latin LIQUIRITIA 'licorice' becoming *maurizio* 'Maurice' in the Italian dialect of Taranto or *sug de Lucrézia* 'juice of Lucretia' in that of Modena — involves elements which may have reference but are semantically empty. Even longer words may be replaced by a whole word if there is sufficient phonological similarity. French *échalote* [eʃalɔt] 'shallot', in origin a loan from Occitan, is widely replaced in popular usage by *charlotte* [ʃaʁlɔt] (a female proper name), a replacement possibly abetted by reanalysis of the initial vowel as part of a preceding (plural) definite article [le] (see Dauzat 1946:110).

One reason why it may, none the less, be tempting to see *FE* as lending semantic motivation to the target words is that the results typically do manifest some kind of semantic association. Cases which seem semantically to 'motivate' a word are, however, generally the accidental effects of a different principle. The search for substitute forms begins in the same semantic field as the problem word, just as it involves phonologically similar forms (cf.

Olschansky 1996:130; and Ronneberger-Sibold 1992 for a typology of the phonological factors involved). Apparent semantically 'motivating' cases of *FE* can plausibly be described as a side-product of a search strategy which begins among items of similar form and of similar meaning. Romanian *ferăstrău* 'saw' probably derives from a possible Hungarian form **fürésztö* (cf. Hristea 1958:515f.; but also Sala 2006:40f.), but its very common popular variant, *fierăstrău*, has clearly been influenced by the word *fier* 'iron'. This is not necessarily because speakers need to motivate the word semantically: after all, they *know* what it means, and they know perfectly well that a 'saw' is made of iron. The problem lies in the unanalysability of the borrowed polysyllable, so that speakers search to motivate it morphologically with 'familiar' constitutive elements, which they naturally seek in the semantic sphere of the referent. Since 'saws' are objects made of iron, the observed development is unsurprising. In Italian *gelsomino* 'jasmine', for example, a part of the original form is replaced by the word *gelso* 'mulberry'. A mulberry is of course also a plant, but it is one quite unlike a 'jasmine', from virtually every conceivable point of view (its appearance, its size, the uses to which it is put, its scent, and so forth). If the purpose of *FE* were to 'motivate' semantically, then *gelsomino* would be a resounding failure, because the result would evoke a kind of plant which a jasmine most definitely is not. The word *gelsomino* is plain misleading, whereas its historically underlying form was not, being simply an opaque, arbitrary, sign. The frequent semantic resemblances between input and output in *FE* are no more than an accidental by-product of a strategy adopted by speakers when they seek to replace elements of unfamiliar words with more familiar ones (cf. also Alinei 1997:21): they search first in the same general semantic area — just as they also tend to search for replacement forms that are phonologically similar.

There is another respect in which *FE* can sometimes yield 'nonsense', again illustrated by *gelsomino*. This word has acquired the outward appearance of a compound word, comprising a noun plus some modifier (along the lines of, say, Italian *terracotta* literally 'earth baked'), except that the second element, *-mino*, corresponds to nothing in the Italian lexicon. The same holds of Abruzzese kampo'mɔi̯llə 'chamomile', only the first element of which is analysable as an independent word. Within the 'folk-etymologized' word we end up with a secondary, residual form — indeed an example of what morphologists often call 'cranberry morphs' — a structural element to which no meaning can be ascribed, rather like the element *cran*, as opposed to *berry*, in English *cranberry*.

Probably the majority of historical linguists who have considered folk etymology have explicitly, or implicitly, reached the conclusion suggested by our Romance data, namely that semantic (re-)motivation of opaque words falls well short of explaining the mechanisms at work, moreover many see that what is at work is a process of imposing internal (compound-like) internal structure on (usually) long words, by exploiting existing, familiar, forms regardless of the semantic results. Indeed, this is a view with a long pedigree:[1]

> Nothing is in fact operative but the natural expectation of finding, in a word which looks like a compound, familiar elements; we expect […] in a word which gives the impression of a compound, that its single elements should admit of connection with simple words. (Paul 1890:232; 236).

> It is in many ways akin to analogy as a factor of group-formation counteracting the mechanical effects of phonetic change. The intervention of associative etymology may result in formal or semantic modifications, or in both [...]. (Ullmann 1951:91f.).

[1] See further Saussure (1968:238;240); Wartburg (1925:17); Bloomfield (1935:450); Orr (1963); Hockett (1958:287); Orr (1963:11); Duchácek (1964); Coates (1987:324); Hamp (1992:427); Olschansky (1996:131-35); Blank (1997:306); Ronneberger-Sibold (2002:106;116). See also the distinction between 'secondary motivation' and 'secondary interpretation', in Olschansky (1996:146-48).

> popular etymology (or 'folk etymology') refers to the process in which an etymologically obscure word is reinterpreted and transformed in such a way that its form becomes familiar and - ideally - its meaning becomes transparent. (Geraerts 2010:64)

It is noteworthy that this 'formation of pseudo-compounds', so to speak, seems to be speakers' usual reaction to long and unfamiliar words. There is another kind of conceivable reaction, that they would simply tend to become phonologically 'scrambled', not in the ways habitually produced by phonetically based regular sound change, but rather through simple confusion of the segmental content and syllabic organization of the word. To take a hypothetical example, one could imagine some Italian dialect in which *automobile* 'automobile' became ***aumotolebi*, or ***taumetolibo* or ***daumodolipe*, or whatever. One's impression is that such 'scrambling' is not a common reaction in such cases, if it occurs at all, although the question deserves further study. There may indeed be phonological distortion of the original input, but this tends to occur as part of a structural reanalysis of the target word, so that the word comes to comprise existing words or morphemes. If there is 'scrambling' or 'distortion', it is in the form of dissonance between form and meaning. It certainly seems to be the case, however, that phonological similarity, within the same semantic sphere, can favour associative effects. Take for example the Romanian *pârău* 'stream, brook', which has developed a variant *pârâu*, now generally the preferred form. The word is in origin structurally opaque, being apparently borrowed from Albanian *përrua*. It happens to be not only semantically close to the native word *râu* 'river' (< Latin RIUUS), but also phonologically close to it, in that the final syllable of the word for 'stream' (-[rəu̯]) differs in only one degree of vowel height from the word for 'river' ([rɨu̯]). The second syllable of *pârău* has now generally been replaced by *-râu*. Now the plural of original *pârău* is *pâraie* (in common with a number of Romanian words ending in *-ău*: e.g., SG *f*(*i*)*erăstrău* 'saw' - PL *f*(*i*)*erăstraie*). However, this folk-etymological replacement of the final syllable of the word for 'stream' by the form of the word for 'river' generally occurs only in the singular, so that the plural corresponding to the innovatory singular *pârâu* remains untouched, as *pâraie*, and this result is a type of morphological alternation unique in Romanian just to this one word. The plural of the word for 'river' is *râuri*, and a corresponding plural *pârâuri* 'streams' is indeed occasionally attested, but it is unusual. So it is the singular, phonologically very similar to the word for 'river', which is affected by the latter, but not the plural, where the phonological resemblance is much smaller. This observation suggests that there is a perceptual dimension to FE: phonological similarity between the target word and some other word may induce speakers to suspect that within, say, *pârău* they may actually be hearing *râu*.

Gilliéron (see, e.g., Iordan and Orr 1970:173; Hillen 1973:90) believed that *FE*, far from being 'pathological' or involving just rare and obscure words, was a constant and continual process in human language. If we include purely semantic *FE*, he might have been right, but the morphological manifestations of the phenomenon do seem characteristically to involve speakers' reactions to rare and unfamiliar lexical items. None the less, there is probably far more 'folk-etymologizing' at work in language than we ordinarily recognize. French examples such as *éclaircité* (comprising *éclair* 'light, lightning') for *électricité* 'electricity', or *apétirif* (containing an element homophonous with *appétit* 'appetite'), for *apéritif* 'aperitif', cited anecdotally by Orr (1963:10), seem to be ephemeral and have apparently never become established even as substandard variants. They are, no doubt and as Orr suggests, representative of processes which are permanently at work but rarely gain traction in the language, because they tend to be filtered out under the influence of the written standard (see also Dauzat 1946:109f.). It should be borne in mind that writing offers precisely the fixedness and structural clarity that tends to be lacking in speech. The examples that come to the notice of linguists often

do so because the effect is comical. The true extent of the phenomenon remains difficult to assess, and its manifestations should not be too lightly dismissed just because they are often ephemeral or a matter of anecdotal report.

Folk etymology has a rather interesting theoretical implication, in that it suggests the independence, in language change, of form from the meaning with which it is (usually arbitrarily) associated. This implication has traditionally not been recognized: for example, an early and influential survey of folk etymological phenomena in Italo-Romance (Jaberg 1930), considers 'form' — understood purely as phonological substance — as indissolubly linked to semantic content. In fact, it is possible to redeploy meaning-bearing forms in abstraction from their associated meanings, using them, for example, to create word forms which clearly have the structure of compounds, but lack the content of the associated parts. It chimes with a general distinction in linguistic theory between 'meaning' and 'motivation', the latter relabelled 'iconymy' (*iconimia*). The latter is pervasive (especially in the formation of compounds) and involves what Alinei terms 'recycling of pre-existing signs'. A sign is 'motivated' (is an 'iconym') by virtue simply of being a familiar member of the existing stock of signs in a language, which makes it available as an element in the creation of new lexemes. For Alinei (1997:16), this 'motivation' is not 'an aspect of the nature of the sign, but an expedient by which the arbitrary sign may immediately be apprehended by all'. The 'iconym' has only a 'publicizing function, it is a name that has lost its own qualities to become the label of a new referent, a label which is already known and serves only to publicize that referent'. FE seems to be an instance of Alineian 'sign-recycling', for it involves signifiers being manipulated independently of their conventional meanings. That speakers can manipulate the 'form' side of signs can be illustrated, finally, by the following example, originally brought to light by Wartburg (1925:24); see also Baldinger (1973:258). This may not be a conventional case of 'folk etymology', but it is a rather spectacular example of associative morphological effects, such that the structure of one word influences that of another, in the complete and utter absence of any semantic link. In the Occitan dialect of La Canourgue (Lozère, southern France), Latin ASINUS 'donkey' and ACINUS 'berry' became homophonous, in the form 'aze, through regular sound change. Later, 'aze 'donkey' was replaced by its (near) synonym, the feminine noun 'saụmo (originally 'beast of burden'), but this lexical replacement strikingly affected not only 'aze in the meaning 'donkey', but equally 'aze in the meaning '(black)berry', so that 'saụmo comes to represent both. In this way, a lexical replacement whose motivation is, at first, synonymy (one meaning of 'aze, and the meaning of 'saụmo, are the same) undergoes a reanalysis such that replacement is sensitive no longer to shared lexical meaning, but merely to the fact that both 'aze and 'saụmo are lexical forms of the language, so that when the latter replaces the former in one of its meanings, it equally does so in the other homophone, of unrelated meaning. For futher discussion of this case and its implications, see Maiden (2008). The inherent dissociation between form and content in *FE* is further evident in the Romanian by-form *filigram*, for *filigran* 'filigree', mentioned above. The source of final *-gram* is a large series of learnèd and technological words ending in *-gram-*, a formative of Greek origin and derived from the Greek verb 'to write': e.g., *telegram*(*ă*) 'telegram', *radiogramă* 'radiogram', *fonogramă* 'sound recording', *program* 'programme', *anagram*(*ă*) 'anagram', *pentagramă* 'pentagram'. Now the connexion with 'writing' in these words is likely to be apparent only to someone with a knowledge of Greek. For ordinary speakers, *-gram-* is surely little more than an element which frequently occurs at or towards the end of a series of erudite or technical words. It is simply a recurrent, discrete, piece of word-structure without identifiable distinct meaning, and as such it is available for incorporation into the erudite, technical word 'filigree'.

In conclusion, there is no reason to believe that *FE* is in any way peculiar to the Romance languages. There is reason, however, to think that it might be especially common in languages that are like Romance in possessing a productive source of new and perhaps unfamiliar

polysyllabic words, as manifest particularly in learnèd word-forms entering the standard languages from, say, Classical Latin or Ancient Greek.

3. Contamination

Contamination (a term first used by Paul 1890=1970:161) differs from FE both on the formal and on the semantic side. Whereas FE characteristically involves formal interference between words at the level of 'morphemes' (here understood as continuous stretches of phonological substance associated with a particular lexical or grammatical meaning), often, as we have seen, independently of any associated meanings, contamination seems typically — although not always — to involve submorphemic phonological 'fragments', and to act between words which are semantically linked. Some classic examples in the early history of Romance languages are the development of Latin CRASSUS 'fat' under the influence of the semantically similar *'grossu 'large', yielding, e.g., Romanian *gras*, Italian *grasso*, French *gras* 'fat' (see, e.g., *DÉRom*, s.v. */'grass-u/). The stressed vowel of Romanian *greu* 'heavy', Italian *greve* 'heavy, painful' (see *REW*, s.v. *gravis*), reflects the effects on Latin GRAUIS 'heavy' of its antonym LEUIS 'light' (see also Malkiel 1951:494-497). French *framboise* 'raspberry' reflects the influence on original *bramboise* (< old Frankish *brambasi) of the reflex of FRAGA (the source of French *fraise*) 'strawberry' (cf. *FEW*, s.v. *brambasi). Typically, the words implicated in contamination are alternative, or opposite, terms in tightly organized paradigmatic series, such as kinship expressions or antonyms, and perhaps especially words also liable to be recited as *lists*, such as numerals, or names of days of the week or of months. It is possible, where such 'list' words are concerned, that there is a 'syntagmatic' as well as a 'paradigmatic' component to contamination, speakers phonologically anticipating, or maintaining, phonological portions of following or preceding terms in the list.

Romance names of weekdays show widespread contamination effects. The Latin antecedents mainly had the form 'genitive form of name of deity' + DIES 'day': LUNAE DIES 'day of the moon, Monday', then, MARTIS DIES (Mars), MERCURII DIES (Mercury), IOUIS DIES (Jupiter), UENERIS DIES (Venus). The Spanish continuants (which do not preserve the word for 'day'), are *lunes, martes, miércoles*, *jueves*, *viernes.* The element *-es* continues the Latin third declension genitive ending -IS although, crucially, genitive case-marking is extinct in most Romance languages, so that *-es* has no morphological status. The appearance of the element *-es* in *lunes* and *miércoles* has no etymological or historical phonological explanation, and is plainly due to contamination from the other words in the series. We have an example of 'prosodic' contamination in the word for 'Wednesday'. In Spanish, and across the Romance languages it carries, or carried, stress on the first syllable rather than the second, contrary to what is predicted from Latin MERCÚRII (cf. also Romanian *miércuri*, Neapolitan 'mjerkuri, Sardinian 'merkuris). It seems likely that the fact that the names of all other weekdays (except Sunday) are stressed on the first syllable, and perhaps especially the model of 'Friday' (UÉNERIS (DIES): cf. Romanian *víneri*), led to the stress-shift in 'Wednesday'. The names of the last four months of the year were in Latin SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER, NOUEMBER, DECEMBER. 'October' is slightly aberrant, in that it does not end in -EMBER. The pattern we find in Italian continues this, and is one widely reflected across Romance: *settembre, ottobre, novembre, dicembre*. In two Romance varieties, apparently independently, the 'anomaly' has been 'corrected', albeit only in respect of the consonant: in the area around Naples (*AIS* map 325), one finds for example ɔ't:umbrə (alongside se't:ɛmbrə, etc.); in Romanian we have *septembrie*, *octombrie, noiembrie*, *decembrie.* In some dialects of north-western Italy (see *AIS* maps 322/323), we find that the final consonant of the word for 'July' (< IULIUS), expected on the basis of its etymology and regular sound change to be [j], is instead [ɲ], the consonant in fact expected for reflexes of IUNIUS 'June': thus, Cortemilia (*AIS* point 176) gives expected ɟyɲ 'June', lyj 'July', but Vico Canavese (*AIS* point 133) ɟyɲ 'June', lyɲ or lyj 'July', Corneliano d'Alba (*AIS* point 165) ɟy:ɲ

'June', lyːɲ 'July'. Numerals provide fewer examples but, for example, it seems possible that the final -[i] of Italian *dieci* '10' (and the numbers from *undici* '11' to *sedici* '16'), corresponding to Latin DECEM, UNDECIM...SEDECIM, reflects the influence of *venti* '20'. The expected final vowel for '10', etc., is -e (and the type *diece* is widely attested), while final [i] is predicted only for the reflex of Latin UIGINTĪ '20'. In some localities (e.g., *AIS* map 288 points Nemi 662, Santa Francesca 664 in southern Lazio), [ˈdjeʃi] '10' seems in turn to have influenced ['nɔvi] '9', for expected, and usual, ['nɔve] (< NOUEM).

An example of contamination in kinship terms concerns the reflexes of Latin SOCRUS 'mother-in-law', and NURUS 'daughter-in-law'. The Romance outcomes of these words (allowing for an adjustment in inflexion class and some other details), are the phonologically predictable ones, except that the stressed vowel of the word for 'daughter-in-law' is not the phonologically expected reflex (here marked '**') of Latin short U, but that expected for a reflex of Latin short O: Spanish, *suegra* and *nuera* (not ***nora*); Italian, *suocera* and *nuora* (not ***nora*). The conclusion seems inescapable that 'daughter-in-law' has been 'contaminated' by the vowel of its correlative term 'mother-in-law'. The position in Romanian is a little more complex: the pair *soacră* vs *noră* (not expected ***nură*), although it shows a vocalic difference in the modern language, may be still have the same origin as the Spanish or Italian pairs of words. It may also show the influence of the vowel of *soră* 'sister' (< old Romanian *soru* < SÓROR), and the influence of 'sister' is unmistakable in a particular morphological peculiarity. Romanian *soră* has a uniquely irregular plural *suróri* (< SORÓRES), and just one other word, *noră*, has been 'contaminated' by this peculiar root-allomorph: the modern language has singular *noră* - plural *nuróri*.[2] Malkiel (1992) discusses the intriguing (but frankly speculative) idea of a kind of contaminatory 'contagion', the replacement of the expected vowel in the reflex of NURUS in early Romance having allegedly entrained other anomalous developments of the stressed vowel in reflexes of the phonological similar Latin words for which the predictable stressed vowel is *[o]: NODUS 'knot', NUX 'nut' (yielding dialectal (Asturian) *nuedu,* Sp. *nuez*), and NUPTIAE 'wedding', yielding (at least as Malkiel suggests) Italian *nozze* (['nɔʦːe]). An example of contamination between lexical opposites involves the reflexes of Latin DEŌRSUM 'downwards' and SŪRSUM 'upwards': while in Romanian, for example, we have the expected outcomes *jos* and *sus*, Italian *giù* and *su* show contamination of the former by the latter (see further Malkiel 1951:497-502).

Membership of tightly organized semantic series such as day-names or kinship terms does not seem to be an absolutely necessary condition for contamination to occur. In some cases, a much looser semantic or functional relation seems sufficient if the words involve rhyme or assonance. Thus, in some north-western Italo-Romance and Gallo-Romance varieties, the reflex of proto-Romance modal verbs *vo'lere 'want' affects that of *po'tere 'be able' in respect of the root-final consonant for the further morphological ramifications of this development. As shown by *AIS* maps 1694/1701,[3] while the normal distinction is the type exemplified infinitive by *volere* vs *potere* or third person singular present indicative *vuole* vs *può*, as found in standard Italian, one finds in, say, Valdieri, vu'lɛr and pu'lɛr, vol and pɔl, with 'contamination' of the root-final consonant. In Italian, the reflex of Latin SPURCUS is *sporco* 'dirty', pronounced not **['sporko], as regular historical phonetic development would predict, but ['spɔrko], which is almost certainly influenced by *porco* (['pɔrko]) 'pig'. This is surely due to the belief that pigs are dirty animals, but such a loose semantic association seems inadequate on its own to motivate contamination. In most Romance languages where its survives, the reflex of Latin MULGĒRE 'to milk' retains its etymological [l] (e.g., Romanian *mulge*, Romansh *mulscher*). In some other varieties (e.g., old Spanish, old Galician, eastern Gascon), and most prominently in Italo-

[2] See also Malkiel (1951:490-494).

[3] See also Frolla (1960), Garnier (1898:26-28;78;80); Azaretti (1982:221), for Ligurian dialects. For the morphological ramifications of this pattern, see Maiden (2018:209f.).

Romance varieties, however, we find, in place of [l], an unexpected [n] (e.g., Italian *mungere*). This verb appears to have been 'contaminated' by Latin (E)MUNGERE 'to blow (some)one's nose', a development (see *DÉRom*, s.v. */'mʊlg-e-/) favoured both by the substantial existing phonological similarity between these verbs, and the semantic resemblance involving 'extraction of a bodily secretion'. Merlo (1906:444) also thinks that Italian *mora* ['mɔra] 'blackberry' (instead of expected *['mora] from Latin MŌRA) owes its vowel to the influence of the adjective *moro* 'black/dark(-haired)' (feminine *mora* ['mɔra], from Latin MAURA), presumably due to the resemblance in colour. The unexpected stressed vowel of Italian *soffre* ['sɔffre] 's/he suffers', instead of etymologically expected **['soffre], is ascribed by Rohlfs (1966:89) to the influence of the phonologically similar *offre* ['ɔffre] 's/he offers', despite the lack of semantic similarity.

We have seen various examples of contamination such that the exponent of one lexical meaning undergoes formal modification of some kind under the influence of the exponent of another related meaning. Some Romance varieties, however, display a remarkable example of contamination such that the morphological influence of one lexeme on a semantically associated one is manifested not in the direct exponent of the lexical meaning, but in the inflexional endings. The contamination takes the form of a change of inflexion class such that the 'contaminated' word joins the distinctive inflexion class of the 'contaminator'. The 'contaminator' in this case is the reflex of Latin third conjugation PLUERE 'to rain', which usually belongs, according to variety, either to the Romance third conjugation, historically stressed on the root (e.g., Italian *piòvere*), or to the Romance second conjugation, historically stressed on the ending (e.g., French *pleuvoir*). Now both the second and the third conjugations are distinctly 'closed', unproductive, inflexion classes in Romance languages: they comprise almost only 'old' words inherited from Latin, and do not acquire new members, but the verb 'to snow' turns out to be a striking exception. In most Romance languages, this verb is a neologism derived from the proto-Romance noun *'neve (< Lat. NIUEM) 'snow', and assigned to the most productive class for neologisms, namely the first conjugation: hence Spanish, Occitan *nevar*. In some Francoprovençal, Romansh, and Ladin varieties, however, there is obvious contamination of 'to snow' by 'to rain', but this is apparent not in the form of the lexical root, but in the introduction of the verb 'snow' into the otherwise closed second or third conjugation classes,[4] thereby exactly mimicking the inflexional behaviour of the verb 'to rain' in the relevant localities. This behaviour can be observed for the relevant regions by inspection and comparison of *ALF* maps 904 and 1035, of *AIS* maps 366, 367, and 377, and of *ALDI* maps 530 and 607. Thus, in the Francoprovençal of Rhêmes-Saint-Georges (*AIS* point 121), we find third conjugation infinitives 'pluwrə and 'nɛjvrə, and past participles plu'yj and nɛ'yj; in the Engadine Romansh of Tschlin (*ALDI* point 1) third conjugation infinitives 'plovər and 'nai̯vər; in the Ladin of San Cassiano *(ALDI* point 91) second conjugation infinitives plo'vai and nə'vaj. There is an obvious semantic link with 'to rain', and the Romance root *nev- also has a phonological point of contact with *plov- just in the final consonant. No doubt these factors motivate the contamination of 'snow' by 'rain', but remarkably the manifestation of this associative effect lies in the assignment of 'snow' to the closed inflexional class with which 'rain' is characteristically (but by no means uniquely) associated, not in the lexical roots which are the ostensive exponents of the lexical meanings.

Contamination, in Romance languages as elsewhere, is an elusive phenomenon. It is not possible to state necessary or sufficient conditions for it to occur, nor to predict what its morphological effects will be when it does occur, nor even where in a given word-form those

[4] The claim that this verb could continue an alleged Latin verb *nivere*, made for example by Wartburg (*FEW*, s.v. *nĭvĭcare), rests on extremely flimsy evidence, although the various problems with that claim cannot be pursued in more detail here. It is in fact clear that the general Latin verb for 'snow' was NINGUERE, continued in some eastern Romance varieties, and that the forms we are discussing here are Romance innovations.

effects may appear. It tends to occur among words organized into semantically-based paradigmatic series, and often to effect changes in single, submorphemic, segments. Yet, as shown in the example of the verb 'to snow', above, it is actually possible for it to occur outside those elements of word structure which would seem the obvious target of contaminatory effects. The facts of contamination suggest that speakers do not map the semantic components of word-forms directly onto those elements of the word-forms which may appear transparently, and separately, to correspond to them. If, say, just the stressed vowel of the word for 'mother-in-law' can contaminate that for 'daughter-in-law', reflecting the semantic association, it suggests that even *fragments* of the string of sounds meaning 'mother-in-law' can be associated with that meaning, and if, say, the second conjugation ending found in the infinitive of the verb 'rain' can influence the infinitive of the semantically similar verb 'snow', then we have evidence that, for speakers, lexical meaning is, so to speak, 'smeared' across the entire word-form, and not confined to the root. Observations of this kind seem generally to be consistent with the view taken in 'Word-and-Paradigm' models of morphology (see, for example, Blevins 2016) that it is entire word-forms, and the paradigmatic relations in which they stand to other word-forms, which are the basic units of analysis in morphology, and that there is no basic, inherent, mapping of units of form onto units of meaning below the level of the word.

As with *FE*, there is no reason to imagine that contamination is special to Romance languages. One imagines that it could occur in any language where words belonging to the same closely related semantic group also show some degree of phonological similarity.

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