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CHRISTOL AND LINGUISTICS; FROM CLASSICAL LANGUAGES TO CAUCASIAN LINGUISTICS

Introduction

Author of several books on linguistics and language sciences, Alain Christol has been among the foremost specialists on the morphology, syntax, and lexicon of classical languages (Latin, Greek and Sanskrit) and on Caucasian linguistics since the 1970s. His best recent publications address syntax and semantics: *The Syntaktika Syntactic; Syntactic Medium; the Greek and Latin Language*; and the book chapter *From Latin ambiguous to the ambiguity of linguists* in a book entitled *Ambiguity in Greece and Rome*. But his interesting book entitled *The Latin Cooks: vegetable nutrition, lexical study* is exemplary. This book starts with words and tries to specify their place in the technical lexicon of cookery, that is to say, their frequency, competing forms and select semantic associations. For each quotation, he presents the Latin text and a French translation so that the reader can assess for himself what he brings to the theme. In this anthology of texts relating to Roman food and cooking, the reader will also find the first textual expressions, which make it possible to know when the Romans welcomed and used a plant or an object; texts by agronomists and doctors who provided information on the cultural and practical utility of a plant; literary quotations that make it possible to know how a name and its referent were perceived by its users and what was their place in the daily life and imagination of the Romans. Although the Latin used by these cooks first addresses Latinists and historians of the Latin language, it also concerns people interested in the history of food. They will find texts, technical or literary, on the plants that Romans liked to eat, their recipes and their culinary preferences. They will also find etymological notes that retrace the history of the botanical and culinary lexicon, from Latin to the languages of modern Europe.

Christol concentrates on linguistic trends in ancient languages, namely, the classical languages Latin, Greek and Sanskrit as well as Caucasian linguistics, etc. He is deeply interested in the sociolinguistic aspect and multiple other aspects of linguistics of the languages mentioned. We will have a more detailed look at his studies.

Christol and sociolinguistics

Inspired by Meillet, Christol argues that sociolinguistics was constructed from the observation of modern languages and that ancient languages could not provide comparable documentation in the absence of direct contact with their speakers. However, as early as 1921, Meillet emphasized the importance of the social milieu in which languages develop, but it was not until the works of Greek Romanists and dialectologists when achievements of sociolinguistics were used to account for phonetic, morphological or lexical anomalies. (CHRISTOL, 2008) Yet the marriage of sociology and linguistics was not a novel practice; as early as 1905, Meillet, the master of comparative grammar in France, emphasized exterior factors and their coercive elements acting on the individual as defined by Durkheim, who sees the social fact appearing in the Saussurean *langage*. “However, linguistics remained far away from all sociological studies ... and what is more serious, almost foreign to any systematic consideration social environments where Languages develop”. (MEILLET, 1921: 230)

In practice, Christol is of the opinion that it was difficult to reconstruct the social context; the information we have is mainly about the cultivated classes, whereas changes are often born in speakers without a literary culture for whom the language is only a daily tool that can be modified to optimize it, for example, by eliminating the irregularities or by creating networks of para-etymological relations «synchronic» etymology, considered for a long time as «popular».

On the other hand, in a centralist model, Christol disagrees that an official language should be set against dialects that are normally considered to be worthless patois. The Latins had adopted such a model, as Cicero confirms when he seeks to define the best Latin language. (GOLD III: 42)

According to Christol, the language of reference is that of Rome, but like all capitals, the city brought together people from all parts of the Empire, whose skills in Latin had to be very diverse. For Cicero, the urban language (*sermo urbis*) is that of its cultivated inhabitants, free from provincialisms for those who were not born in Rome.

The parallelism established between the dialect of Athens and the language of Rome must not be an illusion; Greek studies and Latin studies have had two very different paths in their relations with sociolinguistics.

Christol and standard Latin

Latin, fixed in its literary norm from the 1st century BC., became the official language of a centralized power; it eliminated local languages in the western world. The dialectal variations disappeared from written form as early as the 2nd century. BC. and one can carry out studies of Latin by ignoring all the dialects of Latium, since none of them has acquired the status of literary language and our documentation is limited to a few inscriptions, mostly epitaphs and dedications.

When one notes variants in the inscriptions of the classical or imperial epochs, they are considered as faults in relation to a norm, errors of uneducated writers, and these faults are of more interest to Romanists than to Latinists, insofar as they announce the posterior evolution of the language.

According to Christol, it was the Romanists who first engaged in sociolinguistics when they sought the Latin levels that gave Romance languages their lexicon and grammar and the causes of the fragmentation of *Romania* into dialects.

The Greek dialectological link in sociolinguistics

Christol distinguishes between the dialectological state of Greek and that of Latin. He maintains that historians of language, like literature specialists, at first confronted the problem of dialects, literary dialects first, when it was necessary to comment on Homer or Pindar, and then Geopolitical dialects, to analyze the multiple data of epigraphy, whose documents span more than a millennium and provide abundant documentation for the political and cultural history of the Hellenic world.

Nevertheless, as Brixhe has shown¹ the Hellenists, who had developed the idea that there was a “good Greek”, had some difficulty in admitting that Attic was a dialect among the others. (Brixhe, 1996)

Another Greek phenomenon, according to Christol, is the emergence of *koines*². He is of the opinion that this emergence succeeded Attica when the Greco-Macedonian expansion made Greek a language of communication and culture from the Mediterranean to Bactria and India. But Christol, the specialist of ancient languages, thinks that Greek was not just a language of communication

¹ «From the cultural and political prestige of the classical Athens there emerged a certain ideological scheme which was formed in the imaginary of the Hellenist, where Attic substantially occupies the place of French (standard) ... the Attic is the non-dialect, functioning as a kind of norm or at least reference“ (1990: 42–44).

² See Brixhe (eds.) 1996/

and culture; there have been other forms, such as the Ionian *koine*, which was the language of culture of the Aegean world in the centuries preceding the expansion of Athens; it is this *koiné* that Herodotus uses, and we find its influence in the first writers of “attic”, Thucydides or the Tragicists. (1996)

Christol's Phonetics and Phonology

In an article entitled “The laryngeals between phonetics and phonology”, Alain Christol distinguishes between two trends in the reconstitution of Indo-European languages: the establishment of a phonological grid and the reconstruction of the phonetic realizations of these phonemes. He takes advantage of the methodological bases of N.S. Troubetzkoy, whose theoretical insights have been used and cited in the work of Kurylowicks and especially of Martinet. Christol is of the opinion that in establishing a phonological grid, the number of phonemes for a given language is limited. That is to say the method of communication used for living languages can be applied to Indo-European languages. It justifies the idea that the comparison between the monemes of known languages makes it possible to establish relations of equivalence between phonetic units which constitute them. He defines Indo-European languages by one of these relations of equivalence between unity of known languages, insisting that the relation which defines it is not reducible to any other unity. He divides the problems of this approach into two major elements. First, he explains that it is impossible to define European languages in synchrony, insisting on the impossibility of keeping the phonological grid intact for a long time. And then, he thinks that reconstruction does not make it possible to reach the language as a whole but only its living, dynamic part. It is obvious that any language uses residual elements that do not belong to any system and are incapable of providing a productive matrix.

His interesting idea about the syllabic phoneme is essential insight. He believes that any non-vocalic phoneme can become the syllable center. He adds that a syllabic phoneme is phonetically complex. He engages in an in-depth study of Northwestern Caucasian languages by comparing syllables whose center is a consonant with syllables whose center is the unique vowel.

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ABSTRACT

Alain Christol was born in 1939. A student of grammar who graduated in the field of Serbo-Croat languages taught classical linguistics at the University of Rouen from 1967 to 2004. He published more than one hundred articles on morphology, syntax, the lexicon of classical languages (Latin, Greek and Sanskrit) and on Caucasian linguistics. Twenty eight of his articles, rewritten and completed, were brought together in *Words and Myths* in 2008. Several other books published by Christol are devoted to Latin and to Greek such as *Homonymy in Latin and Greek lexicons* and *The Latin of the cooks: vegetable nutrition, lexical study*. The latter addresses the Latin lexicon of cooking, which he reconstructed from two collections of recipes, transmitted under the name of Apicius, a famous «gastronome» of the time of Augustus, although these texts were written between fourth and seventh centuries and in a language that departs from the classical norm.

In this study, an attempt will be made to draw the outline of important aspects of Christol's research.

Keywords: *Alain Christol, sociolinguistics, Greek, Latin*