COGNITIVE CATEGORIES AND NOUN CLASSIFICATION
ROMANCE NEUTER: FROM [PASSIVITY] TO [INDIFFERENCE]

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Abstract: The present contribution aims to reveal the ways in which the evolution of the grammatical category of gender from Latin to Romance reflects the dramatic changes undergone by its semantic domains. Arguments for the hypothesis that Latin gender oppositions were determined by the important role played by *activeness* (and not *animacy*) in the interpretation of the state of affairs are brought into the picture in order to explain the subcategorization of nouns in both Latin and in Romance. The term *activeness* is to be understood as a reflection of the 'capacity of referents for influencing human life in positive or negative ways'.[1] The changes undergone by grammatical gender in Romance languages were triggered not only by a morpho-syntactic reorganization of case and number, but also by social and pragmatic factors that triggered a reorganization of cognitive categories and their linguistic encoding.

Keywords: activeness, animacy, cognitive categories, grammatical gender, noun classes

1. Introduction

The way in which the evolution of Latin gender has usually been presented makes an interesting case, proving -- once again -- that confusing 'real properties' and linguistic semantic features, either extensional or intensional, can lead to inappropriate descriptions of linguistic phenomena. The classification of Latin nouns into various subcategories according to their behavior in gender agreement has been considered as a reflex of two main inherent semantic oppositions: [Animate vs. Inanimate], usually considered as corresponding to the property of being living or not, and [Masculine vs. Feminine]. The neuter gender was considered as a marker governed by the semantic inherent feature [-Animate], whereas the difference between masculine and feminine would have encoded features belonging to the subcategory [+Animate]. The fact that nouns referring to non-living objects were of masculine or feminine gender was attributed to a primitive conception labeled as 'animism'.[2] Since many Latin nouns (especially in the 3rd and 4th declensions) do not have an explicit gender morpheme different from the stem, the gender of a noun is recognized by the gender of its modifiers (pronouns and adjectives). The labels assigned to the four main categories of agreement are as follows:

(i) masculine:

(1) *vir* *bonus…* *is…*
man bonus-SG M he-SG M
'good man. ... he'

(ii) feminine:

(2) *femina bona…* *ea…*
womangood- SG F she
'good woman ... she'

[1] See Aristotle, in Kirwan (1993), Meillet (1937), Manoliu (1990, forthcoming).

[2] The current definitions of 'animate' always refer to the feature [alive]. For example, in *Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*, Animate is defined as follows: 1. alive; having life. 2. lively, vigorous, spirited. Animism: (derived from *anima* 'soul'): '1. the belief that all life is produced by a spiritual force separate from matter; 2. the belief that natural phenomena and objects, as rocks, trees, the wind, etc., are alive and have souls'. According to Ball (2000: 218): 'Animate nouns refer to living beings (people, animals), inanimate nouns to objects or abstractions.'

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(iii) neuter:
(3) *vinum bonum… id…*
wine good- SG N it- SG N
'good wine it…'

(iv) nomina communia:
(4) *cives bonus … is…*
citizen good- SG M ... he- SG M
'good citizen (man)...he...'

(5) *cives bona... ea*
citizen good- SG F... she.
'good citizen (woman)... she...'

The hypothesis which considers that the Latin (or Romance) noun classes (subcategorized on the basis of their agreement behavior) are based on the feature [±Animate], conceived as an expression of [±Living], fails to account for the fact that neuter gender, which supposedly encoded the feature [Non-living], has disappeared as a grammatical category. When the label is still present in Romance grammars, it refers to a variety of phenomena that differ fundamentally from their Latin counterpart: low individuation, inability to specify gender distinctions (collective animates, reference to utterances: pro-sentences, etc.). [3]

2. 'Animacy' and Latin noun classes

In disagreement with the widespread idea that the Latin neuter gender represented an expression of non-living referents, we shall argue in favor of Meillet's hypothesis (1921.1:199-229 and 1937.2: 24-28) that the subcategorization of Latin nouns according to their behavior in agreement strategies reveals an interpretation of the world that takes into consideration the capacity of influencing human life in negative or positive ways, i.e. the *capacity of being active* (cf. Meillet's 'force agissante') or the opposite. Compare the following distribution of nouns:

(i)'capable of being active':
(6) feminine: *terra* 'earth', *arbor* 'tree', like *femina* 'woman'
masculine: *ignis* 'fire', *ventus* 'wind', like *vir* 'man'

and

(ii) 'incapable of being active' (passivity): neuter
(7) *saxum* 'stone', *templum* 'temple', *tempus* 'time'; most nouns referring to fruit: *pirum* 'pear', *prunum* 'prune', hypernyms (i.e. generics for species: *animal*, etc.

The fact that the concept of Animacy differs from one culture to another is reflected in the fact that even its linguistic models have changed more than once. For example, even as early as the beginnings of the 1980s, Comrie (1981:192) advanced a hypothesis which combines a complex of features that should be represented as a hierarchy:

> … the animacy hierarchy cannot be reduced to any single parameter, [...] but rather reflects a natural human interaction among several parameters, which include animacy in the strict sense, but also definiteness (perhaps the easiest of the other parameters to

[3] See Smith (2007), Acquaviva (2002), Ojeda (1993), Manoliu-Manea (1990), Bonfante (1961), Spitzer (1941).

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extricate from animacy), and various means of making an entity more individuated -- such as giving it a name of its own, and thereby making it also more likely as a topic of conversation. The various individual parameters that we have discussed in this chapter are often closely related to one another, but there are also individual irreducible differences, and the over-all pattern is of a complex intertwining rather than of a single, linearly hierarchy.

Recently, according to Luraghi (2007), who deals with the origins of feminine gender in PIE, the Animacy hierarchy should be reformulated taking into account features such as concrete, control, intentional, manipulated, discrete, continuous (see Table 1). The feminine gender would have encoded the second cognitive category, the semi-animate, characterized by the same capacity of being in control and non-manipulated as the first class. The third class, the inanimates, lacked the capacity of being in control and could be manipulated.

Table 1

I ANIMATE	II SEMI-ANIMATE	III INANIMATE
concrete	abstract, non-manipulated	concrete, manipulated
animate	semi-animate	inanimate
+intentional	-intentional	-intentional
+control	+control	-control
highly individuated	less individuated	non-individuated
discrete	Continuous	-
plural count	-	collective

As Jakobson (1963) emphasized, the grammatical categories encode only those features considered as the most important characteristics of objects in the life of a society.[4] The above distribution of the feature [±Control] suggests that in the culture of some ancient peoples the distinction between entities capable of being in control (consequently, capable of affecting human life) and those incapable of being so was an important factor in their everyday experience. Such a hypothesis accounts for the fact that the feature [±Control] was an important reason for the PIE subclassification of nouns in two grammatically encoded genders: the noun class of neuter (comprising also living beings[5]), incapable of being in control, and the class of 'common gender' (comprising nouns referring to either males or females, among other entities). Differences relating to natural gender could be expressed by lexemes as is also possible now.

2.1 Morpho-syntactic features supporting Meillet's hypothesis

2.1.1 Syncretism of Nominative and Accusative

The hypothesis that the Latin neuter is considered as a distributional class of nouns reflecting a feature which deals with the incapacity of being actively and effectively involved in the event can account for the fact that neuter nouns always syncretize the nominative (the case of the topic or of the subject par excellence) with the accusative (the direct-object case). This syncretism recalls the behavior of an ergative language, in which the ergative case is the marker of the noun expressing an 'agent' or rather an 'active force'. The distinction between nouns carrying the feature [Active] and those carrying the opposite feature (i.e. [Passive]) is

[4] The characteristics assigned by Luraghi (1970) to the feminine gender remind us of a patriarchal type of society where the social dominance model was imposed.

[5] For languages which used neuter as a default gender in predicative nouns when referring to mixed-gender antecedents see Hock, 2007.

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more important than the syntactic distinction between subject and object.[6] A relic of this interpretation may be illustrated by the following Latin examples:

(8) *Marcus* *saxum* *mouit*
Marcus-M NOM stone- SG N ACC moved
'Marc moved the stone'

(9) *saxum* *mouit*
stone-NOM moved
'the stone moved',

where *saxum* has the same ending either as a direct object or as a subject.[7]

2.1.2 The morpheme –M as a direct object marker

These morpho-semantic properties cannot be unrelated to the fact that neuter morphemes (for subject and direct object) in one of the most productive morphological noun classes (the second declension) are identical with accusative morphemes in feminine or masculine nouns in singular across declension boundaries.[8] The Latin accusative is a typical case for the non-agentive participant. Compare:

(10) a. neuter: *templu**m***
'temple'- SG N NOM/ACC
b. non-neuter: *servu**m*** and *femina**m***.
'servant'- SG M ACC 'woman'- SG F ACC

There is evidence to suggest that the ending ***-s*** originates in a nominative marker that occurred only with nouns carrying the feature [+Active] (see Lyons, 1968: 356 and Wolfe, 1980).

2.1.3 The features of the agentive Noun Phrase

Another syntactic feature that supports our hypothesis may be found in the behavior of the Prepositional Phrase in passive constructions. As Ernout and Thomas (1953: 207-208) point out, the construction of the passive Prepositional Phrase *ab* + NP is acceptable for nouns referring to the following concepts:

(11) --'persons': *a tyranno uapulaui* 'I was struck by the tyrant',
Seneca, *Contr*. 9.4,2;
--'animals': *superamur a bestiis*, 'we are surpassed by (the) animals' Cicero, *Fi*. 2,111;
--'birds': *ab aquila ... impositum* 'inflicted ... by [an/the] eagle', Cicero, *Leg*. 1,4;

[6] For a detailed presentation of ergativity see Givón (1984: 151 -168). In a subclass of ergative languages, the *ergative* marked the subject in a transitive construction with a deliberate initiator agent and a clearly affected patient, whereas both the direct object of a transitive construction and the subject of an intransitive construction took the *absolutive* case. Hewson (2007) points out that in Germanic the promotion of inanimates to the role of subject was a late development, which triggered the necessity for a passive voice.

[7] Since this syncretism is found in neuters of every Latin declension,*–m* ending is not the only neuter morphological marker: e.g. *animal, calcar*, 'spur', *os* 'mouth', *cornu* 'horn'.

[8] See also other accusative forms in *–m* for 'living beings' belonging to different declensions: *principem* 'chief', *leonem* 'lion' (3rd decl.); *tribum* 'tribe' – (4th decl.), *plebem* 'people'(5th decl).

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--'things' (which we would consider as inanimate but entail the idea of activity): *luna* 'moon', *sol* 'sun', *natura* 'nature';
--'inner states': *felicitas* 'happiness'; *uirtus* 'virtue', etc. *ab his uirtutibus tot uitia superari*, 'so many vices to be surpassed by these virtues', Cicero, *Cat*. 2, 25.

These morpho-syntactic features lead us to the conclusion that [Incapable of being active, Passivity] was considered as an inherent stem feature of neuter nouns but situationally (event-dependent) features of non-neuters.[9]

2.2 Socio-cognitive arguments

As in any other language, Latin noun classes correspond in fact to cognitive prototypical categories, to a classification of objects according to the way a certain linguistic community interprets, conceives its environment. After analyzing various approaches to the prototype theory leading up to the cognitive models, Lakoff (1987: 56-57) presents a list of relevant characteristics two of which can explain satisfactorily the fact that noun classes are culture-dependent, since they encode a human subcategorization of the state of affairs, namely:

(i) Categories are organized into systems with contrasting elements. Human categories are not objectively 'in the world' external to human beings [...] Basic-level structures depend on human perception, imaging capacity, motor capabilities, etc. and
(ii) The properties relevant to the description of categories are *interactional properties*, properties characterizable only in terms of the interaction of human beings as part of their environment. Prototypical members of categories are sometimes describable of such interactional properties. These clusters act as gestalts: the cluster as a whole is psychologically simpler than its parts.

An interesting definition of the feature encoding 'capacity for affecting other entities' as an inherent characteristic of objects may be found already in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (Book Δ, Chapter 12) under the name of δύναμις, δυνατόν – άδυναμία, άδύνατον (roughly 'capacity' – 'incapacity'):

> We call a CAPACITY what originates a change or alteration either in another thing or *qua* other, as for instance housebuilding is a capacity which is not a constituent of the things being built, but doctoring, which is a capacity, might be a constituent of the thing being doctored, but not of it being doctored. (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* in Kirwan, 1993: 46)

and later:

> INCAPACITY is lack of capacity, i.e. of the kind of origin described, either in general or by something which characteristically possesses it or even at a time already characteristic of its possession. For people would not assert in the same way that a boy, a grown man, and a eunuch are incapable of begetting. Again, corresponding to each of the two capacities (for merely changing things, and for changing them satisfactorily) there is an opposite incapacity (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* in Kirwan, 1993: 47).[10]

[9] For the interpretation of [Passivity] as a semantic inherent noun feature in Latin see also Cameron (1985).
[10] Later (1019[b] 33), Kirwan adds to 'capacity' in parentheses the translation 'power'.

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It is to be noted at this point that the notion of CAPACITY is confined to a specific type of capacity, i.e. the capacity of doing something (change or alteration) and it is partially synonymous with the cognitive model of prototypical causation as defined by Lakoff (1987: 54-55), as a cluster of the following interactional properties:

(i) There is an agent that does something.
(ii) There is a patient that undergoes a change to a new state.
(iii) Properties (i) and (ii) constitute a single event; they overlap in time and space; the agent comes into contact with the patient.
(iv) Part of what the agent does (either motion or the exercise of will) precedes the change in the patient.
(v) The agent is the energy source; the patient is the energy goal; there is a transfer of energy from agent to patient.
(vi) There is a single definite agent and a single definite patient.
(vii) The agent is human
(viii) a. The agent wills his action
b. The agent is in control of his action
c. The agent bears primary responsibilities for both his action and the change
(ix) The agent uses his hands, body, or some instrument.
(x) The agent is looking at the patient, the change in the patient is perceptible, and the agent perceives the change.

It is very likely that only the first six properties were relevant for categorizing nouns in Latin. However it is not impossible to imagine that, according to the Latin conception of the universe, some forces (though not persons) could be viewed as referents that control and act with a purpose.[11]

At this point it is necessary to specify that the *environment* is not necessarily confined to social structure but encompasses a variety of interconnected worlds:

(i) the *social organization* of a linguistic community;
(ii) the *natural world*, knowledge of which is determined by scientific developments and individual and collective experience;
(iii) the *supernatural world (*including religious representations.) Religious beliefs are shaped both by knowledge of natural world and social organization.

In brief, the morpho-syntactic and cultural evidence supports the morpho-semantic hypothesis that associates the category of neuter nouns with the feature [+Incapable of being active], and the opposite category (masculine and feminine nouns) with the feature [Capable of being active].

The class of non-neuters comprising masculine and feminine distributional classes seems to correspond only prototypically to active powers (in the sense that they are capable of affecting human life), such as wind, fire, earth, or men and women (see Meillet, 1921. 1: 199-229 and 1937.2: 24 - 28).[12]

[11] In Foley and Van Valin (1984: 290-300) the usual term for an active participant is *doer.* This is the argument of a predicate that corresponds to the participant who performs, effects, instigates or controls the situation denoted by the predicate.
[12] A word such as *manus* 'hand' of feminine gender has also the meaning 'force'.

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The inclusion of nouns referring to such forces in the same grammatical gender as women, for example, reminds us of the most prototypical attributes of a 'woman' in the Early European civilization: life, fertility, protection (the mother's womb), death and rebirth, features assigned to the ancient goddesses in the Mediterranean area as well as in other ancient cultures such as Celtic cosmogony (see Eisler 1988, Ryan and Pitman 2000). As Eisler (1988: 36) emphasizes:

> In the mythical images of Crete – the Goddess Mother of the universe, and humans, animals, plants, water, and sky as her manifestations here on earth – we find the recognition of our oneness with nature, a theme that is today also reemerging as a prerequisite for economical survival.

The hypothesis emphasizing the role of [Passivity], defined as the inability to affect human life, in the gender classification of Latin nouns does not contradict the view that the development of *a grammatical gender* is not based merely on semantic motivations of one kind or another. According to the hypothesis advanced by Brugmann (1897) and developed later by Lehmann (1958) and Fodor (1959), grammatical gender in Indo-European first developed through agreement (or 'concord'). As Jakobson (1963) emphasized, agreement has a phatic function, insuring text coherence especially in languages with a relatively free word-order that creates the possibility of inserting various constituents between a noun and its modifiers. More specifically, similarity of linguistic function led to similarity of endings (i.e. agreement) between nouns and the corresponding adjectives and pronouns, without reference to sex or natural gender.

It is far from easy to determine how far the semantic interpretation assigned to [±Feminine] and [±Incapacity] in various Early (Indo-)European languages remained in Latin -- i.e. to what extent the idea that beings could or could not be inherently passive or assimilated to men and women was still relevant for Latin speakers. What is beyond doubt is that the supernatural world (including the religious space) was full of representations reflecting the socio-cultural organization of the Latin linguistic community. One has only to think of the extent to which the forces of nature were represented in Latin and Greek mythology by men and women.

3. Factors favoring the loss of the neuter as a grammatical category

3.1 Socio-linguistic and cognitive factors

The loss of the neuter gender (associated with the inherent semantic feature [Incapable of affecting human life]) in Early Romance must have been the consequence of a change in the perception of the state of affairs, when 'to be active or not' became a contextually assigned feature according to the events linguistically reconstructed as it was already the case in the classes of feminine and masculine nouns. According to our hypothesis, the changes in the cognitive category based on the inherent feature of [±Incapable of being active] must have been triggered by several factors derived from new types of interaction between human beings and their environment, namely:

(i) At the dawn of the Common Era, Roman civic structure is characterized by the clash between three different types of government: Roman Republic/Empire, City-state (Greek), Near Eastern Temple-state (Judean).

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(ii) At the religious level, Mediterranean polytheism meets Oriental monotheism, which opens the doors for a new religion, Christianity.[13] More than a half century ago, Muller (1945) already emphasized the role played by Christianity in the reconfiguration of the romanized peoples' mentality and, consequently, in the encoding of new cognitive categories.
(iii) Contact between several ethnic groups, with their own type of culture.
(iv) Contact between different types of languages encoding different cognitive categories that reflected different interpretations of the 'state of affairs'.

It is obvious that the clash between these contrary cultures could lead to the loss of civic, religious, linguistic, and even ethnic identity (see Mack 1995: 19-42), which would have dramatic consequences for the perception of the world and trigger the reorganization of cognitive categories. The link between natural gender and grammatical gender (encoding inherent semantic features such as 'passivity' and 'dynamic force') becomes even more blurred. The only distinction in natural gender which seems to have been capable of persisting through this cognitive reorganization rests on the prototypical difference between males and females. It is for this reason that Romance grammatical gender remains semantically motivated as long as it encodes natural gender.[14] But, in the majority of cases, it is only its *phatic* function which justifies its possibility of remaining a syntactic criterion for subclassifying nouns (namely the gender agreement between nouns and their modifiers).

A change in the features characterizing cognitive categories cannot, on its own, explain either how and why the redistribution of Romance nouns by gender proceeded as it did, in particular, and the fact that, generally speaking, the category of neuter nouns was absorbed into that of masculine or (less frequently) feminine, rather than the reverse. The new subcategorization of referents could not have immediate impact on the grammatical structure for well-known reasons. In brief, it would not have been possible to bring grammatical gender into line with natural gender without an excessive number of complicated linguistic modifications, such as changes in selectional rules, and in the use of affixes. The effort would have been all the more costly (in Martinet's sense) since the stage of linguistic development reached by Latin grammatical gender as a phatic means did not call for a reorganization according to natural gender. Gender, functioning as an iterative connective element, as an indication of the link between the noun and its modifiers, is not strictly tied to the extralinguistic differentiation between nouns denoting living beings and those denoting things, or between females and males. It is precisely due to the loosening of the link between the linguistic gender and the cognitive model of the referents, which allowed other factors to contribute to the reorganization of the grammatical category of gender, namely:

(a) various morpho-syntactic factors, especially the loss of case endings and the need to avoid the confusion between singular and plural, not forgetting the role of morphological analogy and/or
(b) a new semantic interpretation of gender affixes, which led to a resubcategorization of noun stems, differing even from one Romance-speaking area to another.

[13] As Shlain (1998: 201-202) emphasizes, 'In the sixth and the fifth centuries B.C., a number of hitherto unfamiliar schools of thought emerged suddenly, appearing in locations across a wide geographical band extending from China to Greece; they included Jainism, Ascetism, Materialism, Sophism, Rationalism, and Legalism. In addition, the cult of Bhakti in India and Dionysus in Greece imbued this period with an intensely agitated aura.'

[14] In Romance languages there are a few cases in which the difference between masculine and feminine was remotivated as a difference in size: e.g. Sp. *hoyo* 'hole' - *hoya* 'big hole', *canasto* 'small basket' (with a small opening)' – *canasta;* Fr. *grêle* 'hail' - *grêlon* 'hail-stone'; *carafon* 'small carafe' - *carafe* 'water bottle, carafe'; It. *buco* 'little hole' - *buca* 'hole, letter box'; *gambo* 'stem' - *gamba* 'leg', *coltello* 'knife' - *coltella* 'big knife' (of a butcher), etc.

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3.2 The evolution of the case system: the loss of the distinction between Accusative and Nominative

In spoken Latin, due to the spread of syntactic subjectization, probably at first as a mark of the topical constituent, the subject ceases to be necessarily associated with the notion of 'activeness'. Consequently, the subject marker could occur with any type of noun. Since the role is assigned to participants by the event, and the event is usually represented by the verb, there is no wonder that the verb would carry the mark for indicating that the most active participant or another participant is the most salient discourse entity, and consequently, accorded the subject status. It is for this reason that Late Latin and Romance would develop a plain passive form.

The function of the subject is manifested first and foremost by agreement in number and person with the verb and so there is little wonder that the case marker becomes redundant and, though later in some areas than in others, the distinction between nominative and accusative disappears altogether. Consequently, the subcategorization of nouns according to the syncretism between nominative and accusative is lost.

3.2.1 Western Romance

In Ibero-Romance, for example, the loss of case distinctions happens when *-s* in the singular is lost and the endings *-os*, *-as* are generalized in the plural. perhaps encouraged by the Osco-Umbrian varieties, in which the same morphemes were also used for nominative plural. In Gallo-Romance, the difference between masculine and neuter nouns of the 2nd declension with regard to the behavior of case morphemes was lost for the reason that, here, there was an especially pronounced tendency to extend the mark of the subject-case *-s*, from the masculine to the neuter. This tendency, for originally neuter stems to take masculine gender morphemes, was already attested in Latin:

(12) Lat. *corius* 'skin, leather', *dorsus* 'back, ridge' for *corium, dorsum* in Plautus,
balneus 'bath', *vinus* 'wine', *fatus* 'fate', for *balneum*, *vinum*, *fatum* in Petronius.

It is interesting to note that, in Old French texts, the nouns that best preserved their nominative forms were however those carrying the feature [+Person] (see Reenan and Schøsler, 1997, Schøsler 2001). Later on**,** new forms without *-s* are reconstructed for neuter nouns that had an *-s* in Latin, probably because *-s* became the plural marker par excellence:

(13) Sp. *cuerpo* 'body', *pecho* 'breast' - but Lat. *corpus*, *pectus*.

3.2.2 Eastern Romance

In the east (i.e. in Italian and Romanian), where not only the *-m* of the accusative singular is lost as everywhere else, but also the *-s* of the nominative singular (e.g. *lupus* 'wolf'- It. *lupo*, Rom. *lup(u)*), the distinction between nominative and accusative singular was lost in 2nd-declension masculine nouns of the. Consequently, the paradigm of masculine nouns fell into line with the neuter nouns and1st declension feminine nouns, where this had happened earlier. Compare, for example:

(14)

Cl. Lat.:	M	N	F	E. Romance:		
NOM:	*filius*	*caelum*	*porta*	*filiu*	*celu*	*porta*
ACC:	*filium*	*caelum*	*portam*			
	'son'	'sky'	'gate, door'	'son'	'sky'	'gate, door'

Cf. It. *figlio, templo, porta*, Rom.*fiu, templu, poartă.*

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3.3 The need to avoid the confusion between singular and plural

The need to clearly express the distinction between singular and plural proved stronger than the need to maintain the distinction between neuter and non-neuter. The characteristic neuter plural ending --*a* (e.g. *folium* 'leaf', pl. *folia*) was also the ending of feminine singular nouns of the 1st declension. The loss of the importance of the semantic distinction between animate and inanimate nouns was no longer an impediment to reinterpreting noun forms ending in -*a* as feminine singular nouns. The feminine constituted the marked term of the opposition of gender, and -*a* was (already in Latin) the most characteristically feminine ending, since –*a* was already in Latin the thematic vowel of the first (and most regular) declension which was represented by a considerable number of feminine nouns, many of them of high frequency

As a matter of fact, in Romance languages, -*a* or its various allomorphs became even more generally felt as feminine singular endings. Even in Italian and Romanian, which occasionally retained the plural -*a* (though usually replacing it by the plural endings par excellence -*e* and -*i*), the ending –*a* was reinterpreted semantically, as, for example, in the evolution of the collective singular or plural. The plural is the marked term in the number opposition and the spread of the characteristic masculine and feminine plural endings (-*s* in the west, -*i*, -*e* in the east) to originally neuter nouns contributed to the obliteration of the morphological distinction between neuter and non-neuter.

4. The semantic remotivation of neuter pronominal forms.

Semantically, the Romance neuter expresses the speaker's indifference to the gender and/or the number [±Discontinuity] of the referent/antecedent. This 'indifference' is triggered by a variety of pragmatic factors:

a. The speaker does not know the name of the object and, consequently, uses a neuter pronoun:

(17) Sp. *Que es esto*? 'What's this?', Fr. *ça (donne-moi ça*! 'give me that!'), It. *a ciò*, 'for that [purpose]', etc.

b. The referent is a compound of males and females:

(18) collectives (Rom. *popor* 'people', *stol* 'flock') but also inanimate collective plurals (It. *iditti* 'the-PL M fingers' and *le ditta* 'the:COLL PL N fingers (of a hand)') or singulars (Asturian Spanish *pil**u*** 'the hair as a collective entity' vs. *pel**o*** 'individual hair').

c. The referent has no natural gender:

(19) Rom. *cer* 'sky', *calculator* 'calculator'

The Spanish neuter article *lo* is used only to nominalize various attributive phrases expressed by:

d. adjectives:

(20) *lo dificil* 'what is difficult', *lo bueno* 'what is good', etc.

The adjective accompanied by *lo* refers to the quality itself, indifferent to both gender and quantification (cf. *la bondad*, feminine abstract: 'goodness'). As (21) shows, the masculine article *el* modifies the semantic structure of the adjective, introducing the features of the

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grammatical gender and number, i.e. individualizing the reference, picking out a particular individual characterized by the quality in question.

(21) *¿Qué lápiz hay comprado*? - ***El*** *rojo*.
'Which pencil have you bought? - The red [one]'.

Lo can also nominalize a Prepositional Phrase:

(22) *yo me encargo de* ***lo del divorcio***.
'I shall take care of the [formalities] of the divorce' (Telenovela: *Preciosa*).

But the gender of the substantivized adjective remains unchanged, i.e. masculine, as shown by the agreement with the predicative adjective:

(23) *el/* ***lo*** *malo es feo*
the-SG M the- SG N evil is ugly- SG M
'the evil [one]/ evil is ugly'

e. Neuter pronouns are used as anaphors with antecedents that represent a whole utterance: Fr. *ce*, *ça*, Sp. *esto, eso, aquello*.[15]

(24) Fr. -- *Eh, eh, dit Cidrolin. On a de l'instruction.*
-- ***Ça*** *ne gâte rien. Vous ne trouvez pas* ? (Queneau, *Fleurs*: 152)
'-- Eh, Eh, dit Cidrolin. One is educated.
-- That doesn't spoil anything, does it? [Don't you think so?]'

(25) Sp. *Román antes me quería mucho* […] *y* ***esto*** *es un secreto grande* (Laforet, *Nada*: 47)
'Way back Roman used to love me very much […] and this is a great secret'.

(26) Pg. - *Você, perdendo a noite, é capaz de não dormir de dia* ?
- *Já tenho feito* ***isso***. (Vaszquez Cuesta et al. 1980: 503)
'- You, [although] wasting your night, you cannot sleep during the day?'
'- I have already done that .'

f. Affective marking (derogatory or hypocoristic):

Fr. *ça* is used exophorically when the domain of the objects from which the referent to be identified is to be picked out belongs to the world of non-persons. In certain contexts, however, *ça* may refer to persons, when the speaker wants to deny the fact that the referent in question resembles a person. In other words, it is not the inherent characteristic of the referent that allows the use of ***ça***, but the way the speaker wishes to present it. It is thus the particular speaker's attribution of a feature such as [Non-person] that conditions the use of *ça* as an indexical to indicate that the addressee (i.e. speaker B) does not believe that (or pretends that) the class description provided by speaker A is appropriate for the referent in question (27), or worse, does not believe that such a class exists (see for example 28):

(27) - *Vous connaissez ça* « *l'Argus de la Presse* »?
- *Non, dit le type.*

[15] For the various functions of Romance neuter see details in Manoliu (forthcoming); Smith (2007), Ojeda (1995), Togeby (1952), Spitzer (1941), inter alia.

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- *Minable. Et* ***ça*** *veut discuter avec moi* (Queneau, *Zazie*: 48*)*
'- Do you know (the newspaper) l'Argus de la Presse?'
'- I don't, the chap says.'
'- Pitiful. And that wants to have a talk with me...'

The idea is that somebody who does not know the newspaper in question does not deserve to be treated as somebody who has the human property of being capable of talking to the smart girl, who is Zazie.

(28) A: - *J'ai entendu la musique des sphères.*
B: - *Et* ***ça*** *faisait quel bruit?* (Queneau, *Fleurs*: 145)
A: - *Divin, mon seigneur. Divin*.
A: - 'I heard the music of the spheres.'
B: - 'And this- SG N made what (kind of) noise?'
A: - 'Divine, my lord. Divine.'

Cela has a similar function in (29), where the neuter demonstrative helps to mark the difference between Lucile's behavior as a grown-up person and her real young girl's feelings.

(29) Héro:
Là. Ma petite héroïne de carton. Laissez-vous donc aller. C'est mieux, les larmes...
Il est assis sur le rebord du lit et lui parle doucement, maternellement presque.
Cela *se raidit,* ***cela*** *se fait fière,* ***cela*** *veut se conduire comme une vraie dame, prendre des responsabilités et* ***cela*** *jouait à la poupée hier encore et au premier chagrin* ***cela*** *courait se jeter dans les jupes de sa maman. Seulement voilà : il n'y a plus de maman.* ***On*** *est grand maintenant,* ***on*** *est tout seul...* (Anouilh, *La répétition*: 462-463).
'Héro :
Well, well. My little cardboard heroine. Go on. It is better, tears...'
He is sitting on the edge of the bed and speaks to her gently, almost maternally.
'**That** [She] stiffens, **that** [she] turns proud, **that** [she] wants to behave like a real lady, take responsibilities and yesterday **that** [she] was still playing with dolls and at the first pain **that** [she] would run and fling herself into her mom's skirts. But, you see: there is no more mom. We are grown-ups now, we are quite alone...'

Hypocoristic *ça* may be used for persons in generic contexts.

(30)	*Les*	*gosses*	***ça***	*se*	*lève*	*pas*	*tôt*
	The	kids,	that- SG N	REFL3rd	get-up-3rd SG	not	early
	le	*matin*					
	the	morning					

'Kids, they do not get up early in the morning (Queneau, *Zazie*: 23).

5. The semantic reinterpretation of neuter gender agreement

In Romanian there is a distributional class of nouns labeled as 'neuter', that requires the masculine singular and the feminine plural of the noun determiners. This noun class has reached a high degree of productivity and frequency: more than 22% of nouns are neuter, with a frequency of 21% (see Manoliu-Manea 1970: 20).

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Unlike its Latin counterpart, the Romanian neuter distributional class is no longer concerned with the degree of participation in the event, with [Incapable of doing], as the regrouping of 'animate' Latin nouns into the Romanian distributional class of neuters shows. Compare (31) a and b:

		Masculine			Neuter
(31)	a.	Lat. *ventus* 'wind'	and	b.	Rom. *vânt* 'wind' – *vânturi* 'winds'
		Lat. *focus* 'hearth'			Rom. *foc* 'fire' – *focuri* 'fires'

Moreover, new words denoting objects have been assimilated to this distributional class:

(32) *un tablou* 'one painting' – *două tablouri* 'two paintings' (cf. Fr. *tableau*);
un calorifer 'a heater' – *două calorifere* 'two heaters'.
un calculator 'a computer' – *două calculatoare* 'two computers'

But the inclusion of collective animates such as *popor* 'people', *stol* 'flock', etc., in the neuter distributional class can be accounted for by postulating a secondary semantic reorganization according to 'the possibility versus the impossibility of talking about gender distinctions', instead of [±Living]. Moreover, in Romanian this semantic feature of 'indifference to sex distinction' also governs the choice of predicative adjectives with multiple subjects (the syntactic level), even when the nouns do not belong to the neuter distributional class. Compare (33) and (34):

'things':

(33) *peretele* *şi* *poarta* *sunt* *proaspăt* *vopsite*
wall-the- SG M and gate-the- SG F are recently painted-PL F
'the wall and the gate have been recently painted'

'persons':

(34) *băiatul* *şi* *fata* *sunt* *bucuroşi*
boy-the-SG M and girl-the-SG F are glad- PL M
'the boy and the girl are glad'

In (33) where the feature [-Indifference to gender] characterizes the multiple subject composed of a masculine noun (*perete alb* 'white- SG M. wall' -- *pereți albi* 'white- PL M walls'), and a feminine noun (*poartă albă* 'white- SG F gate' - *porți albe* 'white- PL F gates'), the predicative adjective takes the feminine form, *vopsit**e***, as in the case of neuter nouns. In (34), the subject expressed by a combination of a masculine noun and a feminine noun refers to persons and, consequently, the adjective takes the masculine form (*bucuroş**i***).

In brief, 'neuter' represents the neutral (or zero) term in the semantic hierarchy referring to natural gender. In this way, Romanian conforms to the Romance type, in which both the morphology and the semantics of grammatical gender are organized around the features [±Sexed] and [± Feminine].

The origin of the Romanian neuter is still open to debate. Even when not banishing the neuter from the category of gender (see Hall 1965), previous works have often reached contradictory conclusions, claiming either that it has nothing to do with the Latin neuter (Rosetti: 1986: 603) or that it is an archaism (Malkiel 1985). After presenting in details the changes in the subcategorization of nouns according to their gender, Graur (1928: 260) emphasizes that:

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> Mais si l'on écarte le latin, comment expliquer que le roumain ait senti le besoin de distinguer un genre inanimé? On pourrait songer à l'influence slave, qui conserve les trois genres de l'indo-européen ; mais les neutres slaves que le roumain a empruntés sont devenus des féminins en roumain pour des raisons purement formelles : sl. greblo > greblă, sl. slovo > slovă, etc., qui montre que le neutre slave n'était pas compris par les roumains. Il ne semble pas que la question soit soluble ; la **linguistique en tout cas ne nous fournit pas de moyen pour la résoudre** [notre emphase].

In our opinion, this innovation cannot be unconnected with the fact that Romanian was situated at the cross-roads of several languages that had a nominal class referring to entities that had nothing to do with the difference between males and females: Albanian (which has the same neuter distributional class as Romanian -- see Brâncuş (1963), Latin, Slavonic, and Greek. When the morphology did not hinder it, Romanian reinterpreted this noun class as encoding a cognitive category encompassing objects whose natural gender could not be specified, either natural forces (*vânt – vânturi* 'wind-winds' - Lat. masculine), things (*scaun–scaune* 'chair(s)' - Lat. neuter); *tablou – tablouri* 'paintings' - Fr. masculine), *calculator - calculatoare* 'computer(s)' - English); collectives compound of males and females (*popor-popoare* 'peoples', *stol-stoluri* 'flock(s)'), or plural of variety for mass nouns (*vin*-SG M – *vinuri* 'wine(s)') - Lat. neuter, *mătase*-SG F – *mătăsuri* 'silk(s)').

6. Conclusions. Remotivation of the neuter grammatical gender

The changes in morphological marking of gender, case and number were only partially responsible for the changes undergone by grammatical gender in Romance languages. Social and pragmatic variables played an important role in triggering the changes in the semantic and syntactic reorganization of grammatical gender. Once an inherent semantic feature such as [±Incapable of affecting human life] had lost its privileged status in gender agreement and became a contextually assigned feature, the neuter gender lost its phatic function and was redefined especially in the pronominal domain as a marker of 'indifference to natural gender and/or quantification'.

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