

Factors of Lexical Stability in (Inter)Action Across Romance

In the historical development of the Romance languages, it is estimated that around 5000-7000 Latin lexical forms were preserved and are still attested in modern Romance, though this estimate depends in part on the inclusion of unattested, reconstructed Latin words (Stefenelli 2011). The "historical fluctuation" (Banniard 2013: 91) with respect to the maintenance or loss of Latin etymology across Romance has been posited to be resultant of a series of linguistic factors: material stability (i.e., persistence of use/relevance to the community or culture), emotivity (i.e., degree of emotive value), lexical frequency, and markedness (Stefenelli 2011: 578-580). However, to date there has been no empirical confirmation of any of these factors on the development of the modern Romance lexicon. Accordingly, as an initial assessment of the relative effects of these linguistic factors on Romance lexical stability, in the present investigation I focus on material stability and emotivity across six Romance varieties, and additionally underscore a cross-linguistic hierarchy of lexical stability (Stefenelli 1992; 2011).

A stratified random sampling of 60 basic vocabulary words (Swadesh 1955) in Latin was coded as +/- material stability and emotivity across Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan, French and Romanian. Adapted from Stefenelli (2011), for material stability, referents inside or outside the human body and experience (which would presumably remain stable) were coded as, respectively, +material stability and -material stability. For emotivity, referents involving or not involving the self were coded as, respectively, +emotivity and -emotivity. Lexical forms that underwent the relevant sound changes but were not subject to replacement or semantic shift were counted as preserved (e.g., French *boire* from Latin *BIBERE*). Table 1 presents the coding for all 60 Latin stimuli, crossed for both linguistic factors.

Total proportions of preserved lexical forms per language and across the entire sample were calculated and submitted to Chi-Square analysis in R. Proportional results suggest that globally, both factors favor lexical preservation, with no difference in magnitude of effect between them. Nonetheless, select language-specific trends are notable, including the effect of emotivity in French running counter to this pattern observed in the other languages. Additionally, overall preservation rates indicate a hierarchy of lexical stability that, while mostly consistent with that proposed in Stefenelli (1992; 2011), places Portuguese as the most lexically preserving and French as similarly preserving to Catalan, as illustrated in figure 1.

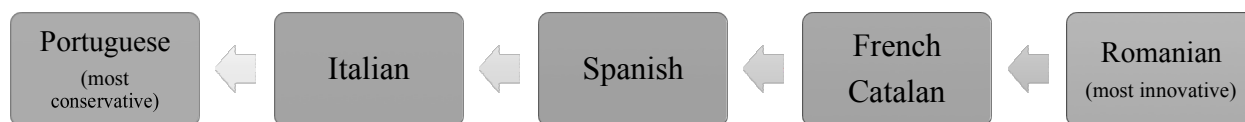
I argue that while these results largely lend support to the notion that material stability and emotivity promote lexical preservation, contrary to Stefenelli (2011), they do not apply across all Romance in the same way. While I suggest that present findings warrant further investigation across Romance varieties with respect to the larger set of proposed factors, the constraint hierarchy (cf. Labov 1969; 2001) for lexical stability evidenced from these data position emotivity and material stability as equally weighted.

Table 1. Lexical Stimuli According to Emotivity and Material Stability

+emotivity -material stability	+emotivity +material stability	-emotivity -material stability	-emotivity +material stability
BONUS	EGO	NATĀRE	ŪNUS
DĪCERE	COR	LAPIS	FĒMINA/MULIER

AUDĪRE	VĪVERE	ARBOR	CUTIS
PELLERE	MORĪ	FOLIUM	DENS
MALUS	LUCTĀRĪ	UNGUIS	GENU
PATER	TŪ	STELLA	AMBULĀRE
CUM	VIDĒRE	VENTUS	OCULUS
MARĪTUS	SCĪRE	CORNŪ	BIBERE
IACĒRE	NŌMEN	GRAVIS	NĀSUS/NĀRIS
MĀTER	NŌS	TRAHERE	MORDĒRE
NOVUS	LŪDERE	VIA	ŌS
DARE/DŌNĀRE	CAPUT	ANNUS	AURIS/AURICULA
TIMĒRE	VETUS	CINIS	DORMĪRE
RIDĒRE	HABĒRE	FRICĀRE	DEXTER
PLĒNUS	LINGUA	VOLĀRE	FRĪGIDUS

Figure 1. Hierarchy of Romance Lexical Stability



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