

From Latin to Romanian Deviously

Author(s): Eric P. Hamp

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From Latin to Romanian Deviously
 Eric P. Hamp
 University of Chicago

Most of what has happened between East Balkan Imperial Latin and the various dialects of Romanian is just what a crusty Neogrammarian would expect. Moreover, the intrusions from the early Carpathian belt, the autochthonous "Dacian", Iranian (Scythian), Albanian, Greek, minimal Thracian, Slavic, Magyar, and Turkish can all be shown to have followed orderly diffusional paths. Therefore any observed deviations are all the more noticeable in this well understood history. It is proposed that at least one set of such phenomena is to be explained as the result of multiple causation in sound change and segmented morph change--a convergence of causes that has in the past attracted the interest of the multifaceted polymath whom we honour, and to the refined elaboration of which he has contributed so much.

There are Romanian words with initial co- and others with po-, and dialect variants thereof, where the Latin or Slavic sources would lead us to expect po-/pa-/ca- or co-, respectively. Graur (1963), with his customary meticulousness, has studied a group of words beginning in co- in which a po- might be expected. He concluded that the Slavic prefix po- became co- by dissimilation when the following root of the complex form began with a labial. Thus one might derive coborî < *poborî < Bulg. poborvam 'a invinge în luptă, a doborî', OCS poboriti; and in this fashion a good half-dozen forms could be explained. The important point here is that the process would be one of dissimilation.

There exists however another half-dozen etyma studied by Mioara Avram (1972) in which an expected p- followed by o or ă is replaced by a velar or dental, and in these cases the next following consonant is not a labial. Thus in place of *pocîrni we find cocîrni. M. Avram's suggestion, prudently guarded, was that here we are in the presence of assimilation.

Now Andrei Avram (1981) has shown that changes of this sort are not restricted to the two kinds of environment just rehearsed; although it should be borne in mind that this is still not to say that the factors alleged might not have applied separately but consistently in each of the contexts mentioned. His point is that exchange between p- and c- is found irrespective of the (dis)agreement in features with the next following consonant, and he has a satisfying number of examples to adduce. A telling and interesting illustration of his point is colomidă < polomidă < pălămidă; notice the following liquid. A further complexity of interest in this form is the rounding of ă in the first instance in the presence of a labial; this development has already been dealt with in a systematic framework by Urișescu (1973:451). A. Avram perceives that the exchange of p- and c- occurs before o and ă, and that these are all to be characterized by the feature [+grave], according to Jakobson's well known system dating back to 1938. This shared feature would, then, have favoured the fluctuation.

Admitting the correctness of any of these explanations, it seems clear nevertheless that at an early time in the history of Romanian a change was possible in a Latin sequence that did not depend upon the dominance or copying of a phonetic feature in such a direct way. By recognizing the essential rôle of areal criteria in the problem in question, Hamp (1980) in studying the problematic lexeme codru 'mountain, chunk of bread' has argued that it is to be derived, in every way regularly and by principled development, from Latin quadra. This leads to the claim that, as a regularity of spoken Latin, *quádr-/codr- < quadr-, originally conditioned by accent and hence by extension through derivational suffixes. Such a process could have led to phonological doublets open to levelling and contamination. Just such a result, productively applied to other lexemes, has been argued by Hamp (1981) for potirniche 'partridge' and its many variants (esp. păturnice) < coturnix and for corindă, the Northwest Ardeal descendant of Latin calendae 'first day of a season'. Such results presuppose a development of alternants (427) qua-/co- > *pa-/co- > *pa-/po- > *ca-/co-; that is to say, co- → po- as if pa- < qua-, and ca- → co- based on pa-/po-.

Now let us summarize the processes which have been envisaged. The proposals of Graur, of M. Avram, and of A. Avram offer plausible and orderly avenues of phonetic facilitation for the observed outcomes from a variety of linguistic sources, but they fail individually and collectively to provide a sharply delineated Lautgesetz. The Hamp proposals identify an early native (Latin) development, independent of intrusions such as Slavic prefixes, which was rare or sparse in application but which laid a groundwork in the shape of rule-governed alternation. Yet this alternation seems intuitively to be insufficient to totally account for the later more massive and proportionately more pervasive post-Slavic shifts of po- > co- and co- > po-.

It is now proposed that in addition to the above phonetic and originally morpho(pho)nemic sources for these changes, alternations, and variants a further reinforcing source for the observed results is to be found in the emerging morphology of Romanian. Graur and earlier workers have pointed to the continuing productivity of the prefix po-, of Slavic origin and bearing a rather abstract derivational semantics. But the Romanian lexicon, continuously drawing upon its Latin patrimony particularly for learnedisms, cultismos, an upper register of speech, and the like, has amassed an appreciable number of abstractly complex forms in co-: coincide, colaborá, comemorá, comeție, comutá, corelativ, corelație, corespunde, corupe. Of course not every one of these is of equal age, but the pattern is evident.

Romanians bilingual in Slavic and drawing learnedisms from Latin could have equated or conflated po- and co- as stem-forming prefixes. Among non-bilinguals the morphological pseudo-equivalence could have exploited the emerging phonetically based morpho(pho)nemic situation.

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