

Swarthmore College

## Works

---

Linguistics Faculty Works

Linguistics

---

1998

### Review Of "The Romance Languages" By R. Posner

Donna Jo Napoli

*Swarthmore College*, [dnapoli1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:dnapoli1@swarthmore.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-linguistics>



Part of the [Linguistics Commons](#)

Let us know how access to these works benefits you

---

#### Recommended Citation

Donna Jo Napoli. (1998). "Review Of "The Romance Languages" By R. Posner". *Journal Of Linguistics*.

Volume 34, Issue 1. 302-303.

<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-linguistics/10>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by . It has been accepted for inclusion in Linguistics Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact [myworks@swarthmore.edu](mailto:myworks@swarthmore.edu).

**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

---

The Romance Languages by Rebecca Posner

Review by: Donna Jo Napoli

*Journal of Linguistics*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Mar., 1998), pp. 302-303

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4176472>

Accessed: 17/07/2014 15:00

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Linguistics*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

clitic in object position when quantification is involved and the presence of the resumptive clitic when there is no quantification, even if a *wh*-phrase is involved.

Chapter 7, finally, challenges the rule of Quantifier raising, first proposed in the Seventies and still currently assumed.

*Author's address:* Dipartimento di studi linguistici e letterari,  
Sezione di linguistica e glottodidattica,  
Palazzo Cosulich, Dorsoduro 1405,  
30123 Venezia,  
Italy.  
E-mail: giusti@unive.it

(Received 20 May 1997)

Rebecca Posner, *The Romance languages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. 376 + xxii.

Reviewed by DONNA JO NAPOLI, Swarthmore College

In my experience books about the Romance languages as a family (as opposed to books strictly on Italian or strictly on French, and so on) generally deal with changes from Common Proto-Romance (or vulgar Latin) into the modern Romance languages, with most attention paid to diachronic phonological rules. This book doesn't start off that way. The change is welcome.

Posner discusses what criteria one looks for in grouping a set of languages into families. Certainly a shared lexicon is an obvious starting point. Posner goes so far as to claim that a speaker of one Romance language will recognize at least half of the common words in any other Romance language (87). However, if we were to use a lexical criterion based only on recognition, languages that have borrowed heavily from Romance sources would be included; English would be a Romance language. While English is highly Frenchified, classifying it as Romance is a mistake from the point of view of morphology and syntax. So the type of shared lexicon bears noting. Basic vocabulary, such as numerals (though there are interesting exceptions) and the words in the Swadesh list (devised to provide a practicable means of comparing common vocabulary items across languages) offer a more perspicacious criterion than the whole vocabulary does.

Morphological characteristics are particularly helpful in recognizing language families. Derivation and inflection in the Romance languages are affixal, prefixes and suffixes clearly coming from Latin. Adverb formation quite generally (though not pan-Romance) involves the suffixation of *-mente*, which comes from the Latin noun *MENS* 'mind' (the source, then, being phrasal). Concatenative compounding is somewhat limited (especially in comparison to the Germanic family), although Posner, unfortunately, doesn't mention the strong similarities in restrictions on compounding across Romance and their source in Latin. Prepositions stand out as a class, deriving from Latin, with variations in meaning across the daughters. Pronouns and possessives are especially conservative, holding true to a pattern traced back to Indo-European. The number of conjugations and their identification via theme vowel, the range of tenses and aspects, the use of an analytic perfect (what Posner calls a 'compound' perfect), moods – all of these are quite similar across Romance and all originate in Latin.

Syntactic characteristics are, likewise, helpful. The development of clitics, their doubling, the distinctions between proclitics and enclitics, clitic climbing, all of these and more are handled here. Characteristics that are common to many daughter languages and that were not common to Latin are discussed. When daughters change in similar ways, we need to consider factors such as inherited peripheral phenomena, the weight of tradition, influence between the daughters, and common external influences, not just the possibility that the relevant changes occurred in the proto-language before the divergence into the daughters. In this regard, for phonology Posner discusses diphthongization and metaphony (the Romance rubric for umlaut).

With morphological and syntactic characteristics to help in identifying Romance languages, Creoles with one Romance language base and which often have a lexicon that is highly recognizable to Romance speakers fall outside the family. Posner points out that creoles generally have uninflected ('invariable') verb forms with tense, aspect, and modality often

## SHORTER NOTICES

conveyed via forms that precede the verb (and she labels each a 'prefix', without discussion to support that morphological status, 72).

The second half of the book is more traditional than the first half. Posner spends one chapter (Chapter 5) discussing the standards one uses in counting languages. She talks about the issues involved in using political boundaries as definitional for contrasting a language to a dialect. She points out the literary and political reasons for calling some dialects languages, including Occitan and Catalan. She points out how the claims by earlier philologists as to language identity have influenced our calling some dialects languages, including Rhaeto-Romance (a group comprised of Ladin, Romansh, Friulian, and others). Within the Romance languages, she points out tendencies that some languages share more than others, grouping French and Italian, on the one hand, and Spanish, Portuguese, Sard, Romanian, and Engadine Rhaeto-Romance, on the other. Posner then gives an overview of the history of language standardization in various Romance-speaking countries. A very interesting, though brief, survey of Romance creoles closes the chapter. In Chapter 6 Posner talks about when the Romance languages differentiated one from another, and in Chapter 7 she talks about how they differentiated. The latter chapter has a particularly nice balance of phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. The final chapter is sociolinguistic, looking at the interaction between different Romance varieties of speech and the interaction between Romance languages and neighboring non-Romance languages. Here Canadian French is compared to the French of France, linguistic conflict is discussed with respect to Catalan and Castilian, bilingualism and diglossia are noted with particular attention to the Italian situation.

There is, in the end, little new in this book and some repetition of topics, perhaps due to the unusual organization of the material. However, the grouping together of information on Creoles, the attention to different standards for grouping languages, and the references to relatively recent generative ways of approaching various phenomena make the book interesting and suggest its use as a text in courses on comparative Romance, particularly for the undergraduate, where breadth without (sometimes tedious) depth is more apt to be appreciated.

*Author's Address: Department of Linguistics,  
Swarthmore College,  
Swarthmore, PA 19081,  
U.S.A.  
E-mail: dnapoli1@swarthmore.edu*

(Received 10 April 1997)

**Rolf Thieroff (ed.),** *Tense systems in European languages II* (Linguistische Arbeiten 338). Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995. Pp. ix + 345.

Reviewed by BERNARD COMRIE, University of Southern California

This second volume of articles on the tense systems of European languages consists of an editorial introduction, two essays on Germanic languages, four on Romance languages, four on Slavonic languages, four on other Indo-European languages, and two on non-Indo-European languages of Europe, as follows: Rolf Thieroff 'More on inherent verb categories in European languages' (1-36), Maria Bonner 'Zum Tempussystem des Isländischen' (37-58, on Icelandic), Östen Dahl 'The tense system of Swedish' (59-68), Hans Petter Helland 'A compositional analysis of the French tense system' (69-94), Fátima Oliveira and Ana Lopes 'Tense and aspect in Portuguese' (95-115), Mario Squartini 'Tense and aspect in Italian' (117-134), Martin Haase 'Tense, aspect and mood in Romanian' (135-152), Heinz Vater 'The tense system of Polish' (153-165), Ronald Löttsch 'Das sorbische Tempussystem' (167-179), Jadranka Gvozdanović 'Western South Slavic tenses in a typological perspective' (181-194), Tania Kuteva 'Bulgarian tenses' (195-213), Nijolė Sližienė 'The tense system of Lithuanian' (215-232), Eva Hedin 'The tense aspect system of Modern Greek' (233-251), Jean-Louis Duchet 'The Albanian tense system' (253-275), Natalia Kozintseva 'The tense system of Modern Eastern Armenian' (277-297), Helle Metslang and Hannu Tommola 'Zum Tempussystem des Estnischen' (299-326, on Estonian), and Ray Fabri 'The tense and aspect system of Maltese' (327-343); a list of contributors, including e-mail addresses, appears on page 345. As is indicated in the titles of the