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AIM AND SCOPE

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ADAM SMITH AND THE BEGINNINGS OF LANGUAGE TYPOLOGY*

EUGENIO COSERIU

Universität Tübingen

1. The name Adam Smith is missing, as far as I know, from all descriptions and bibliographies of language typology. Moreover, the histories of philology do not mention him in this connection. It is usually the case that the history of language typology begins with Friedrich Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (Heidelberg, 1808), and with August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Observations sur la langue et littérature provençales* (Paris, 1818). That is the more surprising because Adam Smith was a noteworthy pioneer of language typology, and it is August Wilhelm Schlegel's theory that depends on Smith's. M.H. Jellinek, *Geschichte der neuhochdeutschen Grammatik*, I (Heidelberg, 1913), p. 31, writes that Adam Smith does not seem to have influenced the theory of German grammar.¹ We shall see, however, that, at least as far as language typology is concerned, Smith had a tremendous influence, because his distinction between syntactic and analytic languages had been considered traditional since the time of August Wilhelm Schlegel.² Otto Funke, *Englische Sprachphilosophie im späteren 18. Jahrhundert* (Bern, 1934), 24-31, gives an excellent description and analysis of Smith's ideas. Instead of Smith's terms (*uncompounded* and *compounded languages*), Funke uses the expressions *synthetic* and *analytic*, which have become familiar through language typology but were not used by Smith. But he does not notice that this is in effect the beginning of language typology. Furthermore, he makes no connection between Smith and the German theory of a later date.

* Authorized English translation by Elisabeth Haggblade, California State University at Fresno, California, of "Adam Smith und die Anfänge der Sprachtypologie", first published in *Wortbildung, Syntax und Morphologie: Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Hans Marchand am 1. Oktober 1967* ed. by Herbert E. Brekle and Leonard Lipka, 46-54 (The Hague: Mouton, 1968).

The aim here shall therefore be to discuss the beginning of language typology and the connection between Smith and the German theory.

2.1. Smith's language typology is contained in his *Dissertation on the Origin of Languages* (complete title: *Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages and the Different Genius of Original and Compounded Languages*), which appeared as an addendum to his work *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. These two works were time and again published together.³

The first and better-known part of this short *Dissertation* contains Smith's theory of the origin of language. This theory, particularly Smith's assertion that general names (appellativa) developed from individual names (proper names), was already subjected to a devastating critique by Antonio Rosmini, *Nuovo saggio sull'origine delle idee* (Rome, 1830) I, 3, 4. That critique is still valid today. This first part shall not concern us here. We shall restrict ourselves to the second part on typology (530-38, in the edition we used), which is more important and interesting for the history of philology in an objective sense because it is not based on arbitrarily selected anthropological hypotheses but on personal observations, at least in its purely descriptive — if not also in the explanatory aspect. It is certainly true that this part is defined by, and depends to a certain degree on, the first part because the analytic character of modern languages is to be perceived as a further step in the development of thinking in the direction of the general concept and abstraction assumed by Smith. In terms of identification, contrast, and meaning of linguistic methods, and as an attempt to explain the typological by means of historical causes, the typological part of the *Dissertation* is, however, independent of the glot-tonic part and can be viewed separately.

2.2. Adam Smith differentiates between two language types: those languages which he calls *primitive, simple, original, uncompounded*, and those which he calls *compounded languages*. He perceives these types to be at once structural, general-evolutionary conditioned, and concrete-historically conditioned. The first feature, from a purely descriptive viewpoint, concerns that which was later called 'synthetic' and 'analytic'. The second feature has to do with old and modern, or, rather, with older and newer languages. At any rate, the determining factor for Smith is the third feature because the characterizations of the other two types also comply with this viewpoint.⁴

With respect to the structural part of language, one type is characterized on the level of material grammatical methods through inflection (declination

and conjugation), the other through periphrastic expression of linguistic function, for which Smith uses the designation *composition* (obviously corresponding to the notion 'syntax'): they would be as it were 'morphologic' and 'syntactic' languages, or, in more modern terms, paradigmatic and syntagmatic languages. As methods, corresponding to *composition*, Smith mentions several times, and in various contexts, the use of prepositions for the function of case and the use of auxiliary verbs. These two types of methods may occur in a non-'primitive' language, but only if they follow a general principle, which is formulated by Smith as follows:

In general, it may be laid down for a maxim, that the more simple any language is in its composition, the more complex it must be in its declensions and conjugations; and, on the contrary, the more simple it is in its declensions and conjugations, the more complex it must be in its composition. (532)

That is to say, the more paradigmatic stipulations, the fewer syntagmatic stipulations and vice versa; i.e., the very principle, which was used time and again for the characterization of the so-called synthetic and analytic languages, is still used. With regard to the contents, the inflection would correspond to more concrete ideas and conceptions, while the *composition* would correspond to more abstract and general ones. This part of typology — which would correspond to the opinion Smith advances in the first part of the *Dissertation* — is, however, hardly taken into consideration whereas he speaks again and again of various examples of the material linguistic methods.

The second feature, the general-evolutionary contrast (older and newer languages), is only cursorily taken into consideration by Smith as this contrast basically leads back to the third. Sometimes it seems, however, that he permits a normal developmental process as well and that he does not necessarily presuppose language mixing. As for example p. 535:

In language ... every case of every noun, and every tense of every verb, was originally expressed by a particular distinct word, which served for this purpose and for no other. But succeeding observation discovered, that one set of words was capable of supplying the place of all that infinite number, and that four or five prepositions, and half a dozen auxiliary verbs, were capable of answering the end of all the declensions and of all the conjugations in the ancient languages.

Nevertheless, in the entire exemplification, the *composition* is explained on account of the mixing of peoples and language.⁵

The third contrast is discussed by Smith the most thoroughly. The periphrastic methods were introduced each time by foreign populations when

learning a new language. For example, the people who immigrated into the Roman Empire were “extremely perplexed by the intricacy of its Latin declensions and conjugations”:

They would endeavour, therefore, to supply their ignorance of these, by whatever shift the language could afford them. Their ignorance of the declensions they would naturally supply by the use of prepositions. (530)

Smith suggests that the process may have been as follows:

... a Lombard, who was attempting to speak Latin, and wanted to express that such a person was a citizen of Rome, or a benefactor to Rome, if he happened not to be acquainted with the genitive and dative cases of the word *Roma*, would naturally express himself by prefixing the prepositions *ad* and *de* to the nominative, and, instead of *Romae*, would say *ad Roma*, and *de Roma*. *Al Roma* [sic] and *di Roma*, accordingly, is the manner in which the present Italians, the descendants of the ancient Lombards and Romans, express this and all other similar relations. And in this manner prepositions seem to have been introduced in the room of the ancient declensions. (530-31)

In the same manner, and for the same reasons, periphrastic verbal forms were introduced:

A Lombard who wanted to say, *I am loved*, but could not recollect the word *amor*, naturally endeavoured to supply his ignorance by saying, *ego sum amatus*. *Io sono amato*, is at this day the Italian expression, which corresponds to the English phrase above mentioned. A Lombard who wanted to say, *I had loved*, but could not recollect the word *amaveram*, would endeavour to supply the place of it by saying either *ego habebam amatum*, or *ego habui amatum*. *Io aveva amato*, or *Io ebbero amato*, are the correspondent Italian expressions at this day. And thus, upon the intermixture of different nations with one another, the conjugations, by means of different auxiliary verbs, were made to approach towards the simplicity and uniformity of the declensions. (531)

Since the mixing of peoples and languages is gradual, the structural difference between *uncompounded* and *compounded languages* is gradual to the same degree. Ancient Greek, for example, is almost purely *original*, hence the complexity of its inflection. Latin is a mixture of Greek and Etruscan, and consequently its inflections are less complicated than those of Greek. Italian and French are, so to speak, mixtures of the second degree, namely of Latin with Langobardic or Frankish. For this reason, Italian and French are still more complex in composition, but simpler in inflection than Latin. Finally, English is a mixture of the third degree, namely of French and “the ancient

Saxon language”. Therefore, English is “more complex in its composition than either the French or the Italian”, but at the same time “more simple in its declensions and conjugations”. For the same reason, English has more auxiliary verbs; in addition to *to be* and *to have*, there are *do*, *did*, *will*, *would*, *shall*, *should*, *can*, *could*, *may*, *might* (532-35). Smith is so convinced of his historical-causal explanation that he even wanted to accept language mixing for Modern Greek (apparently with Turkish):

The same alteration [in the domain of declension] has, I am informed, been produced upon the Greek language, since the taking of Constantinople by the Turks. The words are, in a great measure, the same as before; but the grammar is entirely lost, prepositions having come in the place of the old declension. (531)

2.3. In addition to this characterization, Smith adds an aesthetic evaluation of languages. Contrary to the presupposed logical improvement of the first part of the *Dissertation*, he assumes here an aesthetic deterioration (536-538). The simplification of inflection renders the languages ‘more and more imperfect’ from an aesthetic point of view, which in turn renders them less suitable for poetry. In this vein, he considers the following three traits of modern languages to be negative:

- (a) These languages are more involved than the old ones (these modern languages require several words for that which could be expressed by a single word in the old languages).
- (b) They are “less agreeable to the ear” (and this is due to the smaller variety of endings).
- (c) The word order is less free in these languages. For that reason “prolixness, constraints and monotony” are characteristic of the modern languages.

3.1. All language-typological ideas of Smith reappear in August Wilhelm Schlegel’s *Observations*.

That is, Schlegel differentiates between languages according to the same criteria as Smith, which he calls *synthetic* and *analytic* (p.16). Next to Latin and Greek, however, he adds Sanskrit to the synthetic languages, which “is even more synthetic” (p.17). For Schlegel, and even more so for Smith, the synthetic and analytic grammatical methods would correspond to certain content-types or ways of thinking (which is at the same time equivalent to an evaluation of the logical qualities of the old and the new languages):

They [the synthetic languages] appear at another stage in the development of human intelligence: an action becomes apparent that is more simultaneous, a force of all the faculties of the soul that is more immediate than it is in our analytic languages. Those over which reason presides act more as a part of the other faculties, and as a consequence perform their own operations better. I think that in comparing the genius of antiquity with the spirit of modern times, one will observe an opposition similar to the one that exists among the languages. The great syntheses of creative power were given at the high point of antiquity; the perfecting analyses were reserved for modern times. (27-28)

Again, according to Schlegel, the structural differentiation corresponds to a contrast of old vs. new:

The origin of the synthetic languages was lost in the night of the times. The analytic languages, in contrast, are a modern creation: all those we know were born from the disintegration of the synthetic languages. (16)

Furthermore, he adheres to the contrast of pure vs. mixed:

But this transition to the analytic system has taken place far more rapidly — and, so to speak, in spurts — in cases where there is a conflict between two languages as a result of the conquest, namely that of the conquerors and that of the old inhabitants of the country. That is what had been taken place in the provinces of the occidental empire, which was conquered by the Germanic peoples, and in England at the time of the invasion of the Normans. Provençal, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and English are descendants from the prolonged strife between two languages — of which the one had been that of the majority of the population, the other the language of the nation in power — and of the final amalgam of the languages of the two peoples. (20)

In addition, Schlegel notices that the mixing of two synthetic languages leads to an analytic language.

And here is the special feature that resulted from the formation of the mixed Latin languages. As a consequence of the convergence of two languages, both of which had a synthetic grammar, those languages are born in which the analytic system made the greatest development. (21-22)

He even cites additional examples of the mixing of peoples and languages, such as in Asia, where “the propagation of Mohammedanism and the conquest of the Mongols” were supposed to have had the same effect as the mass migration had on Latin:

... the ancient scholarly and synthetic languages of Persia and India, the Pahlavi and the Sanskrit, have been replaced by mixed languages whose grammar is extremely simplified by means of auxiliary words (86 n. 8)

Persian, in particular, would be comparable to English in this regard:

Modern Persian, in some respects, may be compared to English. The grammar of these two languages is extremely simple. Both have been composed of two heterogeneous elements which were imperfectly amalgamated: Persian of Pahlavi and Arabic, English of Anglo Saxon and French. (87)

August Wilhelm Schlegel’s conception of the process of language mixing was similar to Smith’s:

The barbaric conquerors (they themselves adopted this name which they believed to be honorable, until it began to signify the contrary of being Roman) — finding in the conquered countries a totally Latin population, or, according to the expression of the times, *Roman* population — were in effect forced to learn Latin in order to make themselves understood. But in general, they spoke it largely incorrectly; especially, since they did not know the proper use of inflections on which the whole Latin construction is based. As a result of hearing the language poorly spoken, the Romans themselves — i.e., the inhabitants of the provinces — forgot the rules and imitated the jargon of their new masters. The variable case endings, having been used arbitrarily, now only served to complicate sentences; one ended up cutting off and truncating words ... But these abolished case endings originally served to mark the construction of sentences in a very clear manner. It became necessary, then, to substitute another method in its place; and that is the one which gave birth to the analytic grammar. (24-25)

One may compare this with what Smith says about the difficulties which the ‘intricacy’ of Latin inflection represented to the immigrating peoples, and especially with what he says about the Langobards in Italy.

3.2. Schlegel also agrees with Smith in the aesthetic evaluation of old languages: “I claim that in most respects the ancient languages appear quite superior” (25). Regarding the preference of old languages, however, Schlegel — in opposition to Smith — mentions only free word order, especially for poetry:

One excellent advantage of the ancient languages is the liberty which they enjoy in the arrangement of words. The logic would be met, the clarity assured by the sonorant and marked inflections. Thus, by varying sentences infinitely, by interlacing the words with exquisite taste, the eloquent prose writer, the inspired poet, can appeal to the imagination and sensitivity with a charm that is always new. Modern languages, on the contrary, are severely subjected to the principles of logic because, having lost a large part of the inflections, they must indicate the agreement of ideas by word order. Thus the infinite possibilities of word order known from the ancient languages are no longer possible. (26)

3.3. So far Schlegel agrees with Smith. But he adds also much that is new:

(a) He gives the two language types the names 'synthetic' and 'analytic'. He thereby frees, at least in terminology, the descriptive typology from the evolutionary; i.e., from the historical explanation. Moreover, through the expansion of the exemplification, Smith's contrast becomes a general typological one. The distinction remained basically in the realm of the usual comparison between the classic and modern European languages. Nevertheless, Schlegel is not completely consistent in his use of the new language-typological terms. In a number of cases, he goes back to the expression 'mixed languages' (21, 37, 86), which are contrasted with the "primitive languages and the remaining pure ones" (36).

(b) He includes the contrast synthetic/analytic in a broader language-typological system; i.e., that of Friedrich Schlegel. Smith's general classification thereby becomes a subdivision of a special language type, namely the type of inflected languages. The synthetic and the analytic languages are for Schlegel 'groups' which belong to the 'class' of 'inflected languages'.

(c) Regarding the evolutionary viewpoint, Schlegel is more coherent than Smith. He means explicitly that, as a rule, the development into analytic language structure ought to occur also without language mixing:

Because the synthetic languages were standardized early by books, which served as models, and by regular instruction, they remained so. But when they were left to themselves and became subject to the fluctuations of all the human things, they have shown a natural tendency to become analytic, even without having been modified by the mixture of another foreign language. (18)

As an example, he cites classical Greek as opposed to Homeric Greek (with regard to the use of articles) and the development from Gothic to German (Schlegel considers the Gothic an older form of German) (18-20).

(d) In the analytic method, Smith showed only the use of prepositions for the case functions, and the use of auxiliary verbs. To this method, Schlegel added the article, the use of personal pronouns with verb forms, and the periphrastic comparatives of adjectives with the aid of adverbs. (16)

4. The theory of Schlegel, as far as the distinction synthetic vs. analytic is concerned, remains therefore basically that of Smith. As with Smith, this theory is at the same time structural, general-evolutionary and concrete-historical. On one hand, this theory becomes enlarged and better founded; but on the other, it is reduced to a single language class.

Now the question may arise whether Schlegel really knew Smith's essay and whether he took over from him the essence of his language-typological theory. In my opinion, this cannot be doubted in view of the agreement of the two theories on the whole and in part. Besides, Smith is mentioned twice in the *Observations*: once with regard to the discussion on the superiority of the old or the new languages (25), and again in connection with the classification of languages (85 n. 6):

This fundamental classification of languages [the classification into three basic types or "classes"] has been developed by my brother in his work *Ueber die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, of which the first part has been translated into French following Adam Smith's treatise *On the Origin of Languages*.

One may assume that Schlegel also in this case intended to create a synthesis in his work in accordance with the language typology of Friedrich Schlegel and the ideas of Adam Smith. Schlegel's work itself represented an extraordinary synthesis for the times and opened new paths at the same time. By the way, Schlegel does not write that he introduces the distinction synthetic vs. analytic; but, it seems to me, he only proposes these names: "The inflective languages can be divided into two types, which I shall call synthetic languages and analytic languages" (16). At any rate, it appears that Schlegel did not have Smith's text in front of him when he wrote his *Observations*. That is, concerning the opinion on the old and the new languages, he writes that Adam Smith had given preference to the modern languages (p.25). We have seen, however, that Smith in reality gives preference to the old languages, and he does so in the same way and for the same reason as August Wilhelm Schlegel.

Author's address:

Eugenio Coseriu
Romanisches Seminar
Universität Tübingen
Wilhelmstrasse 50
D-7400 TÜBINGEN
Federal Republic of Germany

NOTES

1) It should be noted, however, that Jellinek's work goes only to Adelung. At any rate, it is strange that Eva Fiesel, *Die Sprachphilosophie der deutschen Romantik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1927), does not mention Smith's name at all.

2) Adam Smith, by the way, also influenced August Wilhelm Schlegel's interpretation of the origin and early history of language, and through August Wilhelm Schlegel also the interpretation of Fichte.

3) I am using here the London edition of 1861 in which the *Dissertation*, 507-538, can be found. The date of publication is usually given as 1759, the year of the first edition of *Theory*. Dugald Stewart, who edited for the first time the edition we used, is of the opinion, however, that the *Dissertation* was added only to the second edition of the *Theory*. The first editions of the work were not available to me.

4) O. Funke, *op. cit.*, 24, note 1, writes that the expression 'compound[ed] languages' in the title of the *Dissertation* means 'analytically formed languages'. In reality, this expression means exclusively *mixed languages* by Smith. He writes for example: "The French and Italian languages are each of them compounded, the one of Latin, and the language of the ancient Franks, the other of the same Latin, and the language of the ancient Lombards" (533); "The English is compounded of the French and the ancient Saxon languages" (534); the Ancient Greek, however, is "in a great measure, a simple, uncompounded language" (532-33). Funke was probably misled by the fact that Smith named the composition as characteristic grammatical method for his *compounded languages*. However, the expression *composition* is also used by Smith for language mixing: "The Latin is a composition of the Greek and of the ancient Tuscan languages" (533).

5) O. Funke, *op. cit.*, 29-30, notices correctly that Smith gave up his psychological-semantic viewpoint here and tries to justify the two language types only in an historical-causal sense. Funke speaks therefore of a "gap in the thought process of observation". Indeed, the synthetic languages ought to become gradually more analytic, even without language mixing, on the basis of those assertions advanced in the first part of the *Dissertation*.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper was to show that Adam Smith (1729-90) contributed significantly to the development of language typology and, as a corollary, to demonstrate the connection between Smith's and the German theory. For this purpose, Coseriu analyzed Smith's ideas on language typology as he developed them in his *Dissertation* (1761). There, Smith presented a bipartite system grouping languages into *compounded* and *uncompounded* languages. The article evaluates from a contemporary vantage point, Smith's system and offers the following observations based on three criteria: 1) *structural*: Smith's principle is still valid: The simpler the composition, the more complex the case endings, and vice versa; 2) *general-evolutionary*: Smith does not always presuppose language mixing as a cause for language change; 3) *concrete-*

historical: Regarding language change, Smith believes that periphrasis is the result of imperfect second-language learning. He also believes that structural change in language is a gradual change. In addition, Coseriu analyzes A.W. Schlegel's ideas on language typology as he developed them in his *Observations* (1818). Comparing Schlegel's presentation with that of Smith, the author arrives at the following conclusions: All of Smith's theories on language typology reappear in Schlegel's work. Beyond that Schlegel contributed additional insights, such as the assumption that the mixing of two *synthetic* languages will result in an *analytic* language; the introduction of new terminology (e.g., the terms *synthetic* and *analytic*); and the expansion of the analytic method by adding other parts of speech (articles, for instance). As a result of these findings, the conclusion is made that A.W. Schlegel changed Smith's theories as follows: 1) The theories become enlarged and better founded. 2) Smith's typology was reduced to a single language classification; i.e., Smith's classification now becomes a subdivision of *inflected* languages into *synthetic* and *analytic*.

RÉSUMÉ

Coseriu vise à mettre en évidence l'importance de la contribution d'Adam Smith au développement de la typologie des langues et, corrélativement, à montrer le lien entre la théorie de Smith et la théorie allemande. Dans ce but, Coseriu analyse les idées de Smith sur la typologie des langues, telles qu'elles sont développées dans sa *Dissertation* (1761). Dans cet ouvrage, Smith présentait un système biparti, classant les langues en *compounded* et *uncompounded*. Avec le recul que donne un point de vue moderne, Coseriu évalue le système de Smith et propose les remarques suivantes, fondées sur trois critères: 1. *structure*: le principe de Smith reste valide: plus la composition est simple, plus les désinences casuelles sont complexes, et vice versa; 2. *d'évolutionisme* général: Smith ne présuppose pas toujours un contact de langues pour tout changement linguistique; 3. *d'histoire* concrète: en ce qui concerne le changement linguistique, Smith croit que la périphrase est le résultat d'un apprentissage imparfait d'une langue seconde; il croit aussi que le changement structurel d'une langue est un changement graduel. Par ailleurs, Coseriu analyse les idées de A.W. Schlegel sur la typologie des langues, telles qu'elles sont développées dans les *Observations* (1818). En comparant la présentation de Schlegel avec celle de Smith, Coseriu aboutit aux conclusions suivantes: toutes les théories de Smith sur la

typologie des langues réapparaissent dans l'oeuvre de Schlegel. Schlegel y a ajouté de nouvelles perspectives: l'idée que le mélange de deux langues synthétiques donne une langue analytique; l'introduction d'une nouvelle terminologie (par exemple, les termes de *synthétique* et *analytique*); l'élargissement de la méthode analytique par prise en considération d'autres parties du discours (les articles notamment). A partir de ces constatations, Coseriu conclut que A. W. Schlegel a modifié les théories de Smith de la manière suivante: 1. il les a élargies et mieux fondées; 2. la typologie de Smith se trouve réduite à une simple classification des langues: à la classification de Smith vient maintenant s'ajouter une subdivision des langues flexionnelles: *synthétiques* et *analytiques*.

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