

Formal Syntax, Diachronic Minimalism, and Etymology: The History of French *Chez*

Giuseppe Longobardi

Current theories place very mild constraints on possible diachronic changes, something at odds with the trivial observation that actual “language change” represents a tiny fraction of the variation made a priori available by Universal Grammar. Much recent work in diachronic syntax has actually been guided by the aim of *describing* changes (e.g., parameter resetting), rather than by concerns of genuine *explanation*. Here I suggest a radically different viewpoint (the Inertial Theory of diachronic syntax), namely, that syntactic change not provably due to interference should *not* occur at all as a primitive—that is, unless forced by changes in the phonology, the semantics, or the lexicon, perhaps ultimately by interface or grammar-external pressures, in line with the minimalist enterprise in synchronic linguistics. I concentrate on a single case, the etymology of Modern French *chez*, showing how the proposed approach attains a high degree of explanatory adequacy.

Keywords: etymology, diachronic minimalism, inertia, syntactic change, Romance construct state

Formal syntax and etymology have different traditions, distinct and complementary methods, and often, regrettably, disjoint sets of practitioners; one discipline mainly aims at crosslexical and possibly crosslinguistic generalizations, the other essentially traces the history of single words in the lexicon of particular languages. However, in this article I will try to demonstrate how etymological research may benefit from the results of formal syntactic analyses and how this combination is able to enhance the explanatory power of linguistic science as a whole. In so doing, I will also aim at two theoretical goals: first, I hope to show that, despite the skepticism voiced by Lightfoot (1979 and subsequent work), historical-comparative reconstruction of syntactic patterns is in certain cases quite successful; second, I will begin to outline the foundations of a very restrictive theory of grammatical change, the *Inertial Theory*, trying to implement, for diachronic study, the spirit and some guidelines of Chomsky’s Minimalist Program.

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1 A Historical Problem

The fate of Latin CASA(M) in the history of French is immediately surprising in at least two respects. First, it lends itself to the irregular development in (1a) and essentially not to the phonetically regular and expected one in (1b).

- (1) a. CASA(M) > OF chies > chez
 b. CASA(M) > OF chiese > *chèse

It is true that the expected development does arise very sporadically, but after the Middle Ages this happens only in some proper place names, as in (2a), and in one very outlandish and virtually forgotten acception of a form otherwise endowed with different meanings and etymology (see (2b)).¹

- (2) a. La Chaise-Dieu
 b. chaise = 'fixed amount of land around a castle relevant for inheritance law'²

Second, the development of CASA(M) into *chez* is notable because the word underwent two other intriguing shifts: it apparently came to be used as a preposition and not (necessarily) as a noun, and at least since the sixteenth century it has been attested in a generalized and abstract locative reading that is irreducible to the original meanings of 'hut' and, later, 'house'.³

- (3) chez Marie
 at/to Marie's (home, office . . .)
- (4) Chez Platon, Socrate nous apparaît comme l'homme le plus sage et juste
 in Plato Socrates appears to us as the wisest and most honest man
 du monde.
 in the world

In sum, one lexical item exhibits four diachronic changes: lexical loss of an allomorph still, though rarely, attested in Old French (OF), irregular phonological development, a categorial shift, and a semantic shift.

- (5) a. Lexical = CASA(M)/CHIESE > Ø
 b. Phonological = CASA(M) > *CAS > chies > chez
 c. Categorial = N > P
 d. Semantic = 'home' > 'generalized and abstract location'

These four changes seem to call for an explanation. Let me now clarify in what sense this is so.

¹ Even in medieval texts the word is extremely rare: Tobler and Lommatzsch (1936:s.v.) give only a few examples of OF *chiese* as a common noun, all in the fixed phrase *chiese deu* 'home God'. Godefroy (1883), a much richer source of examples, reports one occurrence without *deu* (dating from 1336) against eleven in the phrase *chiese deu* (all from the thirteenth century). Richter (1907) notes the existence of conspicuous remnants of *chiese* among present-day proper place names, often precisely of the type *La Chaise-Dieu*.

² See Littré 1956:s.v., 8th acception: *En partage de fief noble, nom des quatre arpents de terre qui environnent de plus près le château*. Furthermore, this meaning is completely absent from *TLF* and hardly familiar to even educated contemporary native speakers.

³ The abstract reading of cases like (4) has been attested since around 1580, according to *TLF*.

2 The Inertial Theory: Diachronic Minimalism

The reason why the phonological shift in (5b) needs an explanation is simply rooted in its irregularity (violation of Neogrammarian *Ausnahmslosigkeit* (exceptionlessness)): normally /a/ is the only Latin final-syllable short vowel to be preserved in OF. Therefore, we should find only the sporadically attested bisyllabic *chiese* > *chaise*, whose spelling still exhibits a trace of the final vowel, and not the productive *chies* > *chez*.

As for the changes in (5a,c,d), I will take the radical stand that they call for an explanation by their very existence. This position is, in principle, well motivated on purely conceptual grounds.

A priori, in fact, the *ideally* restrictive theory of language change should probably claim that diachronic change does not exist (also see Lightfoot 1999). This is so because, if diachronic change exists, we are faced with a dilemma: either one must assume that at least some primitive change is unmotivated (i.e., largely beyond the scope of scientific inquiry), which is incompatible with the *ideal* theory; or one loses any understanding of why the previous synchronic state was possible at all. Since it seems to be a fact that changes exist (and previous synchronic states too, of course), the ideal (or perfectly minimalist) theory cannot be fully pursued. This does not mean, however, that a linguist should not try to approximate it, by attempting anyway to reduce the number of primitive changes to a bare minimum and, possibly, to shift at least some of these changes toward and beyond the borders of grammatical systems (e.g., arguing, as has often been done, for the explanatory role of independent changes in social values, material culture, etc.).

Thus, on epistemological grounds, the null hypothesis could be that language is diachronically “inert” up to contrary evidence. More concretely, the idea that language has a certain tendency to remain relatively inert through time (or to change in a limited and regular way) is implicit in many explanations provided by historical linguistics (not unlike the other historical sciences, more generally). I will refer to this shared implicit assumption as the pretheoretic concept of *inertia*, borrowing this felicitous term and intuition from Keenan’s (1994) important study of the history of English anaphors.

Therefore, while the puzzling nature of (5b) immediately descends from the technical hypothesis (6a), stemming from the Neogrammarian tradition, (5a,c,d), like any other change in general, should call for an explanation as a consequence of pretheoretically assuming some version of the methodological hypothesis (6b), stemming at least from Keenan 1994.

- (6) a. Regularity of sound change (*Ausnahmslosigkeit*)
- b. Inertia

However, at least (5c), in particular, could be regarded as calling for an explanation in a stricter sense as well, more akin to the sense in which (5b) is theoretically puzzling: for, in this article, I want to pursue a more technical and empirically precise implementation of the concept of “inertia,” proposing a particular working hypothesis, the *Inertial Theory*, which I will advocate as a realistic, though still highly restrictive and a priori desirable, theory of language change. Assuming such a theory will precisely turn the categorial reanalysis (5c), the most syntactic of the four changes, into a *theoretically* puzzling phenomenon, as is already the case with (5b).

In fact, under the Inertial Theory, I want to explore the possibility of the ideally restrictive theory of *syntactic* change, namely, the hypothesis that at least *syntax*, by itself, is diachronically

completely inert. In Chomsky's (1995) terms, by *syntactic change* I will mean a change in the formal (nonphonetic, nonsemantic) features FF of the items of the lexicon, including all the values of the parameters set for the particular language, taken to be encoded in the various entries, essentially along the lines of proposals by Borer (1984). The semantic and phonological matrices of lexical items will, however, not be similarly constrained.⁴

Therefore, I will suggest that linguistic change proper (i.e., abstracting away from interference)⁵ may only originate as an interface phenomenon, in the sense of Chomsky's Minimalist Program, perhaps just for reasons concerning the relation between language and the external world (pressures from the conceptual and articulatory-perceptual systems).

In other words, I will tentatively assume that syntactic change should not arise, unless it can be shown to be *caused*—that is, to be a well-motivated consequence of other types of change (phonological changes and semantic changes, including the appearance/disappearance of whole lexical items) or, recursively, of other syntactic changes, given a plausible theory of Universal Grammar (UG) and language acquisition.

Such a research program as the Inertial Theory excludes the intervention of probabilistic models in the development of syntax and largely trivializes the sociolinguistic problem of convergence of a speech community on the same innovations. Syntactic change (e.g., categorial reanalysis and parameter resetting) would only take place as a totally predictable reaction by a deterministic core of the language acquisition device (LAD) either to different primary data (typically classical interference, essentially in Weinreich's (1953) sense) or to a change in other more "superficial" components of grammar;⁶ in other words, no such things as "imperfect" learning or "spontaneous" innovation would exist in syntax. Among further empirically testable consequences, the Inertial Theory views syntax as one of the most diachronically conservative domains and thus quite suitable for long-range historical explanations.

Like any nontrivial hypothesis, this approach is likely to be faced with a good deal of surface counterevidence. In order to test its value, it is necessary to show that a number of cases of syntactic change, apparently recalcitrant to the previous restrictive scheme, can eventually be reduced to independent changes in the phonology/lexical semantics of the languages involved that may have triggered the syntactic reshaping.

Even if the Inertial Theory turns out to be empirically false or only partly correct, an important quality, exactly as in the case of the *Ausnahmslosigkeit* hypothesis, is its heuristic value: it forces us to look for explanations for all syntactic changes and to try to reduce unmotivated, primitive changes to the ineliminable minimum and, whenever possible, to find non-ad hoc explanations

⁴ Which does not mean unconstrained or poorly constrained: change of phonological features is certainly subject to some version of the *Ausnahmslosigkeit* hypothesis, and probably the reshaping of both semantic and phonological features is constrained by a theory of markedness. It remains to be seen whether the more abstract principles of phonology and morphology are equally subject to the Inertial Theory.

⁵ In this sense, interference would not be strictly speaking a case of change from, say, grammar 1 to grammar 2, the latter built on a primary corpus generated by the former; rather, it would be a case of the deterministic construction of grammar 2 on a mixed corpus generated by grammar 1 and by other significantly distinct grammars.

⁶ Also see Berwick and Niyogi 1995 for some discussion.

for this residue (e.g., on the grounds of independently observable external factors). The fruitfulness of such hypotheses can be appreciated to the extent that they contribute to finding deep explanations for a portion of even small fragments of the grammatical history of a language, rather than serving as general principles immediately applicable to the totality of superficially observable changes. In this sense, I will try here to attain a modest level of explanatory adequacy, reducing the four French changes described above, crucially including (5c), to the conjunction of a single primitive one and certain principles of UG.

3 The Failure of Previous Analyses

Let me start by analyzing the violation of (6a) instantiated by (5b). In this respect the Gallo-Romance fact is not isolated, but is mirrored by comparable irregular reductions in the developments of CASA(M) in other Romance varieties: Catalan *ca'*, Italian (dialectal) *ca'*, Spanish (dialectal) *cal/cas*, Old Portuguese *cas*. In these varieties, however, the irregular change of (5b) is not accompanied by changes (5a,c,d).

I will begin by stressing the inadequacies of some previous attempts at explaining these forms.

The irregularity of the phonological development of *chez* is noted in all the standard reference sources: see, for example, Richter 1907, Meyer-Lübke 1935, Nyrop 1935:266, von Wartburg 1940, Bloch and von Wartburg 1968, Gamillscheg 1969, Rohlfs 1970, and (for *calcas* of other Romance varieties, where Latin final *-a(m)* also should not drop) Corominas 1954.

The etymological attempts to regularize the sound development recorded in such sources fall into two categories but, as already noted by Meyer-Lübke (1935), Corominas (1954), and Gamillscheg (1969), neither type has any independent plausibility.

The first attempt tries to derive the word from a masculine or neuter stem *CASUS/CASUM, since Latin final *-u(m)* may yield \emptyset in OF. This solution is inadequate because the supposed Latin word is virtually unattested (apparently only an isolated gloss of the ninth century contains *casus* in this meaning)⁷ and because it does not extend to the other varieties, where the regular development of Latin CASU(M) should be *caso* in Spanish and Italian (not *cas/ca*) and *cas* in Catalan (not *ca'*).

The second proposal, attributed by Cornu (1882) to Paul Meyer, among others, supposes a derivation from the ablative plural of Latin *casa*, that is, CASIS (*sic*). This hypothesis is also unsatisfactory and suspect: it gives the impression of being suggested for no reason other than that the ablative plural is one of the forms of the inflectional paradigm not exhibiting the offending stem vowel *a*. This hypothesis runs into the same difficulties as the previous one: it cannot be extended to the rest of the Romance data; moreover, it is even less plausible in that it proposes a derivation from the plural ablative, although normally the singular of Romance nouns etymologically derives from the singular accusative (and more rarely nominative) of their Latin ancestors.

⁷ See CGL II, 571, 33: *casus domus*.

In other words, this proposal seems to beg the question by displacing the diachronic irregularity from phonology to morphosyntax, giving up certain well-established historical generalizations.⁸

To sum up, both hypotheses are

- patently ad hoc (i.e., deprived of any general explanatory power),
- unable to capture the obvious counterparts of (5b) arising in Romance languages other than French, and
- unable to provide a unified account relating (5b) to (5a,c,d)—that is, to the other peculiar changes occurring in French in the same word.

The third inadequacy was in part grasped by Meyer-Lübke (1935), when he noted that no such proposal explains the correlation between the “prepositional” usage of *chez* (as opposed to what he considers the fully nominal one: *Vollwort*) and its phonologically reduced form.

We will see later that this formulation of the correlation is inaccurate not only terminologically but also empirically. This is so because, if one wants to remedy the second inadequacy, bringing into the picture the other Romance varieties, in which (5b) arises without being paralleled by (5a,c,d), one finds that the reduced forms *calcas* occur in clearly nonprepositional usages, that is, as normal nouns in argument position (see below for examples). Nor is it explanatory simply to claim that the “prepositional” context may be responsible for inducing phonological reduction (also see Gamillscheg 1957, 1969), perhaps via stress reduction, because the alleged irregular phonetic developments of other prepositions seem much more sporadic throughout *Romania*.⁹

Nonetheless, Meyer-Lübke’s remark is probably close to correct in spirit: the irregular phonological reduction must have originated in all languages in a syntactically predictable and well-defined environment (despite more sporadic analogical extensions to a few other contexts), which in one language (French) must have also triggered the categorial reanalysis into a preposition.

In this article I will propose an account that attempts to overcome all three inadequacies listed above by means of a formal analysis of the syntax of *chez*. In order to do so, I need to summarize some theoretical and typological conclusions independently reached in Longobardi 1994, 1996, and 1997, a task to which I now turn.

4 The Romance Construct State

A few classes of singular nouns in the modern Romance languages can be shown to move leftward from N to D—that is, to raise from the base position of nouns to the position normally occupied by articles, crossing over potentially intervening adjectives (e.g., possessive ones) and excluding

⁸ It is true that some cases of derivation from the ablative are attested—for example, the Italian toponym *Acqui* (in Piedmont) from ablative plural *Aquīs* and some other cases in Gallia; and Sardinian *domo*, precisely ‘house’, from the ablative singular (the accusative *DOMU(M)* would have yielded **domu* in Sardinian). However, these facts are even geographically sporadic; furthermore, the peculiarity of deriving a singular noun from a plural form in the above-mentioned case involves a noun normally uninflected for number (viz., a proper name). I am indebted to Renato Oniga and Alberto Zamboni for pointing out this type of evidence to me.

⁹ Once again this begs the question of why reduction is so widespread across Romance precisely with *casa*, something that becomes understandable only when typologically related, as I will argue, to some systematically predictable pattern of particular or universal grammar.

the appearance of any determiner. The most salient of such classes is represented by a subset of proper names (see Longobardi 1994) that in many varieties of Italian gives rise to paradigms like the following:

- (7) a. L'antica Roma fu la città più importante del Mediterraneo.
 the ancient Rome was the most important city of the Mediterranean
 b. Roma antica fu la città più importante del Mediterraneo.
 Rome ancient was the most important city of the Mediterranean
 c. *Antica Roma fu la città più importante del Mediterraneo.
 ancient Rome was the most important city of the Mediterranean

It has also been pointed out (Longobardi 1995, 1996) that across the Romance languages the pattern of (7) is not strictly limited to proper names: it extends to a few singular common nouns, essentially a proper subset of the class of kinship nouns (irrelevant for present purposes) and the word for 'home' (*casa* in many Romance varieties).

- (8) a. La mia casa è più bella della tua.
 the my home is more beautiful than the yours
 b. Casa mia è più bella della tua.
 home my is more beautiful than the yours
 c. *Mia casa è più bella della tua.
 my home is more beautiful than the yours

Even the semantics of these raised nouns parallels that of proper names in displaying an object-referring interpretation with all its consequences (transparency in intensional contexts, incompatibility with restrictive relatives, etc.), as discussed in depth in the references cited and in Longobardi, to appear. However, in their raised occurrences, such special common nouns as *casa* display a curious property: they must always be interpreted as discharging a possessor semantic role on an *overt* or *understood* genitive modifier ((1) an overt possessive adjective; (2) a *di* + DP phrase; or, presumably, some phonetically empty pronoun (3) arbitrarily, (4) pragmatically, or (5) syntactically controlled—subject, in the last case, to locality and c-command conditions; see Longobardi 1995, 1996 for more details). These five possibilities are exemplified in (9a–e), respectively.

- (9) a. Casa mia è bellissima.
 home my is wonderful
 b. Casa di Gianni è bellissima.
 home of Gianni is wonderful
 c. Casa è sempre il posto migliore per rilassarsi.
 home is always the best place to relax (= *one's home*)
 d. Casa era ormai vicina.
 home was eventually nearby (= *my/your or, more marginally, his/her home, subject to a prerequisite of pragmatic saliency*)

- e. Maria pensa che la madre di Gianni abbia ripulito casa.
 Maria thinks that Gianni's mother has cleaned up home (= *Gianni's mother's home, unless Maria or Gianni is especially pragmatically salient*)

In no case, then, can the sentences of (9), most crucially (9c–e), ever display the simple ‘‘possessorless’’ interpretation presented by nonraised occurrences of *casa*, as in *La/Quella casa era ormai vicina* ‘The/That house was eventually nearby’, in which a specific house is denoted without any implication that it has to be the home of anyone. In other words, raised *casa* always implies an overt or understood possessor argument.

As a result, it seems necessary for Italian and (as argued in Longobardi 1995, 1996) for the rest of Romance to state the following descriptive generalization:

- (10) Movement of a common noun to (a phonetically empty) D obligatorily cooccurs with the presence of an overt or understood genitive argument.

Elsewhere (Longobardi 1996) I have proposed that the peculiarity of (10) can be understood and reduced to deep principles of UG once it is recognized that the raising construction of *casa* belongs to the same abstract crosslinguistic pattern as the Semitic construct state.¹⁰

Languages such as Arabic and Hebrew have two ways to express an adnominal genitive relationship: the *absolute* (determinate or not) and the *construct* state, a term most properly applied to the morphological condition of the noun heading the construction (see (11f)). Abstracting away from less relevant aspects, the absolute state displays roughly the same structure and word order as a corresponding Romance genitive construction with the preposition *deldi*, namely, D+N(+AP)+P+DP. The construct state construction, attested since earliest times and well studied both in traditional grammar and in the generative framework,¹¹ is instead identified by the cooccurrence of a cluster of properties, among which are the following, which essentially end up providing a surface string of the form N+DP(+AP):

- (11) a. The noun heading the construction occurs first in the whole nominal phrase (arguably, a DP).
 b. An overt phrase understood as a genitive argument always follows the head noun.
 c. The article of the head noun does not appear.
 d. The preposition usually introducing genitive arguments (e.g., Hebrew *šel*, Arabic *dyal*—roughly corresponding to English *of*, Romance *deldi*) does not appear.
 e. Strict adjacency (e.g., no intervening adjective) is required between the head noun and the argument.
 f. The head noun occurs deaccented and often phonologically reduced (e.g., Hebrew *bayit* > *beyt* ‘home’).

¹⁰ The analogy between the two phenomena is already suggestive from a theoretical standpoint: in fact, some of the most recent analyses of the Semitic construct state (see the references in footnote 11) display certain basic features shared by the analysis of Romance N-raising developed in Longobardi 1994 and propose that property (11a) below is a direct consequence of the head noun in the construct state moving up to the D position.

¹¹ See Banti 1977, Pennacchietti 1979, Borer 1984, 1994, Ritter 1986, 1988, 1991, Fassi Fehri 1989, 1993, Siloni 1990, 1994, Hazout 1991, Ouhalla 1991 (also on Berber), Shlonsky 1991, and references cited in these works.

The construct state version of (12a) is thus (12b), with the adjective, if any, occurring phrase-finally. As a consequence of the properties defined in (11), no intermediate case between the construct state and the absolute state, exhibiting mixed properties, is admitted; see the ungrammatical examples (12c–g).

- (12) a. ha-bayit (ha-gadol) šel ha-more
 the home (the-big) of the teacher
 b. beyt ha-more (ha-gadol)
 home the teacher (the big)
 c. *ha-beyt/bayit ha-more
 the home the teacher
 d. *beyt šel ha-more
 home of the teacher
 e. *beyt
 home
 f. *beyt ha-gadol ha-more
 home the big the teacher
 g. *ha-beyt (šel ha-more)
 the home (of the teacher)

The peculiarities found in the syntax and semantics of Romance raised common nouns (i.e., generalization (10)) can be understood if we are able to argue in favor of (13).

- (13) The Romance raising construction of common nouns is nothing else than a marked instance of the UG phenomenon that manifests itself in Semitic under the name *construct state*.¹²

Virtually by definition, the raising construction of the Romance nouns displays the same properties listed in (11a) and (11c) for Semitic; and (11b) is essentially (10).¹³ In order to argue in favor of (13), I have shown elsewhere (Longobardi 1995) that, although obscured by interaction with several language- and construction-specific restrictions, the Semitic properties listed in (11d), (11e), and (11f) are also manifested in certain Romance varieties.

First of all, the most typical raising noun in Italian, *casa*, is also peculiar for the prepositionless realization (cf. property (11d)) of certain possessors immediately following it. This phenomenon is actually lexically restricted to family names in Modern Standard Italian; however, the correlation between this peculiar way of expressing an intuitively genitive argument of the head noun and the fact that *casa* follows the pattern in (9)—and, therefore, falls under generalization (10)—is

¹² In Semitic the phenomenon is lexically fully productive, while in Romance this supposed construct state construction involves only the few raising common nouns mentioned in the text. Such a difference is not disturbing, since it can be related to independent principled differences between Semitic and Romance (see Longobardi 1996). For a productive construct state–like genitive in the Celtic languages as well, see especially Duffield 1991, 1996, Rouveret 1994, Koopman 1994, and the references cited there. Also see Crisma 1997 for an analysis of Old English along similar lines.

¹³ The fact that the genitive argument must be overt in Semitic but not necessarily in Romance has been explained away on the basis of independent properties in Longobardi 1996.

strongly suggested by a paradigm like the one in (14). Here, in fact, the loss of the preposition *di* obligatorily goes along with the disappearance of the article, reproducing, at least in one direction, the Semitic implication between properties (11a,c) and property (11d).

- (14) a. Casa Rossi è qui vicina.
home Rossi is nearby
b. *La casa Rossi è qui vicina.
the home Rossi is nearby
c. La casa di/dei Rossi è qui vicina.
the home of Rossi/the Rossis is nearby

Furthermore, as in Semitic, adjectives cannot be interpolated between the two nouns (property (11e)).

- (15) a. La casa nuova di Rossi è più grande di quella vecchia.
the home new of Rossi is larger than the old one
b. *La casa di Rossi nuova . . .
the home of Rossi new . . .
c. *Casa nuova Rossi . . .
home new Rossi . . .
d. Casa Rossi nuova . . .
home Rossi new . . .

Although Modern Standard Italian displays this idiosyncratic restriction of the prepositionless genitive to proper family names, until very recently the Tuscan variety seems to have known fully structured DPs as prepositionless genitives after *casa*, at least when the latter is embedded in a locative construction. Pasquali (1964) reports hearing examples such as those in (16) in the colloquial speech of Pisa and Florence just a few decades ago.

- (16) a. in casa il conte
in home the count
b. in casa il nonno
in home the grandfather

Significantly, no phrase with a prepositionless genitive cooccurring with an instance of *casa* introduced by the article has been reported, so that the following pattern presumably completes the paradigm:

- (17) a. *nella casa il conte
in the home the count
b. nella casa del conte
in the home of the count

Even more significantly, the correlation is confirmed by historical data. The prepositionless genitive seems to have been extremely productive in earlier stages of literary Tuscan, at least

until the 1500s: according to a preliminary review of a *corpus* of Tuscan texts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in the various documents the number of occurrences of determinerless *casa* followed by a prepositionless possessor phrase ranges from 25% to almost 200% of the number of occurrences of *casa* preceded by an article and followed by a *di*+DP genitive.¹⁴ Furthermore, and most importantly, *no* case of a prepositionless genitive is found with any instance of *casa* introduced by a determiner.¹⁵ Boccaccio's *Decameron*, for instance, provides numerous examples of the relevant construction, such as the following:

- (18) a. Se n'andò a *casa* la donna . . .
 he went to home the woman
 b. Uscita segretamente una notte di *casa* il padre . . .
 going secretly one night out of home the father

Thus, for a long time at least one Italian variety exemplified a construction involving raised *casa* and clearly manifesting property (11d) of the Semitic construct state. Although a few philological works noted this construction in the past (see footnote 15), none of them were able to elucidate it properly from a general point of view, because they failed to establish any typological comparison with Semitic or any relation with abstract construction types of UG.

In many Northern Italian varieties one also finds suggestive, though residual, traces of property (11f) of the construct state, namely, instances of the phonological reduction of *casa*.

- (19) Ho visitato Ca' Garzoni.
 I visited Ca' Garzoni

In order to descriptively account for (11f), let me tentatively propose, just for concreteness, that UG contains some principle of abstract phrasal stress roughly like this: a major phrasal stress always falls on the rightmost head noun of every DP, provided it is not ‘‘obliquely’’ marked (i.e., prepositionally introduced) within the DP itself. Therefore, in (12a) both *bayit* and *more* will carry major phrasal stress, each being the head of its own DP; but in (12b) only *more* will qualify as the rightmost nonoblique head noun for both DPs, *beyt* then being subjected to segmental

¹⁴ I am indebted to Pietro Beltrami and Claudio Ciociola for textual assistance and advice and to Antonietta Bisetto and Gianni Zane for the analysis of the relevant philological data.

¹⁵ Such a generalization, the crucial one of this domain of inquiry, was also lucidly stressed by Poppe (1966), and had even been pretheoretically identified in a description of the literary Tuscan language written by the non-Tuscan eighteenth-century grammarian Salvatore Corticelli; see Corticelli 1745 [1828:344]. Corticelli notes that the genitive possessor with *casa* often lacks the case-marking preposition, that this option is forbidden whenever *casa* is introduced by an article, and that such prepositionless possessors may be proper nouns or pronouns but also internally articulated nominal phrases. (The existence of this text was originally pointed out to me by Paola Benincà.) A similar remark is also found in Azzolini's (1836 [1976:s.v.]) Trentino-Italian dictionary. Poppe (1966) provides an accurate and extremely useful discussion of most relevant material in the Italian domain. He correctly (I believe) accepts Pasquali's (1964) rejection of the simplistic reduction of this Italian construction to a calque from French *chez* and rejects Rohlf's (1969) confusion between this case and the prepositionless adnominal genitive productively realized in OF by means of the so-called *cas régime* (the morphological development of a Latin nonnominative). Again, this seems correct, since the latter, although perhaps (according to Rohlf's examples) residually surviving in a few places in the Italian domain even after the collapse of case morphology, occurs with all sorts of head nouns and does not require them to be articleless. Therefore, without being able to explain it, Poppe identifies the clustering of properties that appears significant for the nature of the construction: (1) it is essentially productive only with *casa*; (2) it requires the article of the head noun to disappear.

reduction as phrasally unstressed (see McCarthy 1979). The segmental effects of this process appear not to be equally regularly visible across all dialects and styles in Romance. Therefore, I will also hypothesize that languages (and perhaps lexical items) can differ in displaying obligatory, optional, or no segmental manifestation (i.e., phonemic reduction) of the systematic suprasegmental process (stress reduction, essentially a shift to a proclitic allomorph).¹⁶

Although marginal, yet suggestive, in Italian, the pattern of *casa* is more productive and revealing in other Romance languages and dialects, especially in Ibero-Romance. In fact, it is particularly striking for its fully “Semitic” structure in Catalan; note the nearly exact correspondence between (20) and the Hebrew paradigm given in (12).

- (20) a. La casa nova del mestre (no és lluny d'aquí).
the home new of the teacher (is not far away from here)
- b. Ca' l mestre (no és lluny d'aquí).
home the teacher (is not far away from here)
- c. *La ca'/casa 'l mestre . . .
the home the teacher . . .
- d. *Ca' del mestre . . .
home of the teacher . . .
- e. *Ca' . . .
home . . .
- f. *Ca' nova el mestre . . .
home new the teacher . . .
- g. *La ca' (del mestre) . . .
the home (of the teacher) . . .

The two constructions in which Catalan *casa* appears exhibit all the main defining properties of the Semitic construct and absolute states, including the (actually optional) phonological alternation between a strong (*casa*) and a weak (*ca'*) form. Therefore, Catalan exemplifies in the best possible way the cooccurrence in Romance of properties (11a–f), as the above line of argument requires.

¹⁶ Actually, the monosyllabic form of *casa* illustrated in (19) is not confined to cases of the construct state but also extends to some “nonconstruct” occurrences of *casa*—for example, when it is followed just by an adjectival modifier or by a prepositional genitive (obligatory with complements other than family names).

- (i) a. Ho visitato la Ca' granda.
I visited the Home big
- b. Ho visitato la Ca' d'oro.
I visited the Home of gold

Still, it is significant that this reduction, by no means the product of regular phonological change, has taken place precisely in the word that seems to undergo a syntactic process analogous to the Semitic construct state and that the reduced form is the one that occurs in all the traditional phrases naming a historical building like the one in (19)—that is, in the actual cases of the proposed Romance construct state. On these grounds, we may view the few occurrences of *ca'* exemplified in (i) as an analogical extension to new contexts of the once predictably reduced allomorph of *casa* originating in construct states as the reflex of property (11f). In other words, in an essentially Neogrammarian fashion, we may factor the origin of the apparently irregular development of Latin CASA(M) into two different processes: regular *sound change* (stress reduction) would have ultimately reduced *casa* to *ca'* in a well-defined morphosyntactic environment, and *analogy* (reduction of allomorphy) would have extended the distribution of the shortened form.

Importantly, some northern Catalan varieties show that even when the genitive argument of these constructions is realized by a possessive adjective, this adjective distinguishes itself from other normal instances of adnominal possessives. In fact, while normal adnominal possessives must always agree in gender and number with the head noun, like all other adjectives, a possessive after raised *casa* is allowed to appear in an unmarked form not agreeing with the head noun and in certain cases homophonous with the masculine singular.¹⁷

- (21) *ca' meva/meu*
home my-FEM/MASC

In some Spanish varieties as well, at an extremely colloquial stylistic level, when embedded in a locative PP *casa* may drop both the article and the preposition *de* normally introducing the possessor DP, and may even be reduced to the form *ca*.¹⁸

- (22) a. *en casa/ca' Pedro*
in home Pedro
b. *??en casa/ca' mi hermano*
in home my brother

What is crucial is that, once again, no example syntactically dropping the preposition while retaining the article seems to occur.

- (23) a. **en la casa/ca' Pedro*
in the home Pedro
b. **en la casa/ca' mi hermano*
in the home my brother

With the restriction that only a locative preposition may select an N-attracting D^0 , therefore, other Ibero-Romance varieties also exhibit the essential properties of the Catalan construction.¹⁹

¹⁷ Manuel Español informs me that for plural pronouns as well there exist special complement forms with raised *casa*, which differ both from possessives (whether agreeing or not) and from regular nominative/accusative personal pronouns.

- (i) *casa nostra/naltrus*
home our(AGREEING)/our(INVARIABLE)

¹⁸ Other examples of this sort are attested in the technical literature and attributed to various Continental and American dialects, documenting the irregular phonological development to *ca* or *cas* in addition to the syntactic properties of the construct state. Compare the following Asturian example reported by both Rohlfs (1970:214) and Corominas (1954:s.v.):

- (i) *Vengo de ca mi(o) padre.*
I am coming from home my father

Further examples of the same structure are reported by Kany (1943:424) for Mexican dialects (I am indebted to Claudia Parodi for this reference), again by Corominas (1954:ibid.) for Galician, and by Cornu (1882) and Poppe (1966:245) and references cited there for Old Portuguese.

¹⁹ According to the references cited, even the Spanish and Galician dialects in question, like the Italian ones, display the property of extending the reduced form *calcas* slightly beyond what one may consider the construct state cases proper: for example, before the preposition *de* (although I found no reduced allomorphs introduced by the article, only some introduced directly by a locative preposition, such as *en/la ca(s) de* 'in/at home of'). Therefore, I will appeal for these varieties as well to the hypothesis of the analogical generalization of the morphosyntactically predictable reduced alternant (see footnote 16).

On the basis of this evidence, I have elsewhere advocated the typological unity of the Romance raised-*casa* construction with the Semitic construct state (Longobardi 1995, 1996).

Now, let me consider what looks like roughly the same phenomenon in a Germanic language, namely, English. Recall that with respect to proper names Germanic largely exhibits the same behavior (lack of article in the singular cooccurring with object-referring interpretation) as Romance, although without visible rearrangement of the surface linear order.

- (24) a. *Rome ancient was the most important city of the Mediterranean.
 b. Ancient Rome was the most important city of the Mediterranean.

For this reason Germanic was argued in Longobardi 1994 not to display overt raising of proper names to D like Romance, but rather only raising at LF (covert movement). Also recall that the Romance raising construction involving *casa* was essentially shown in Longobardi 1996 to be parallel to the raising construction involving proper names, in the sense that N-raising to D entails the same referential properties that trigger raising of proper names. As a result, it is not surprising to find analogues of the Romance construct state construction with *casa* in a Germanic language, but without visible N-raising.

In fact, the same common count nouns giving rise to construct states in Romance (and only they) may occur determinerless in the singular in English: kinship terms and *home*. In addition, precisely in this case they display an object-referring interpretation; and, if no overt genitive argument is expressed, they require an understood one, subject to the usual arbitrary, pragmatic, or syntactic control strategies, exactly as in Italian.

- (25) a. Home is always the best place to relax.
 b. Home was eventually nearby.
 c. John's friend was heading home.

However, as expected, they do not overtly move to D, crossing over adjectives or genitive phrases.²⁰

- (26) a. I miss old sweet home.
 b. *I miss home old sweet.

- (27) a. *home John Smith('s)/my
 b. John Smith's/my home

Therefore, English as well seems to have a construct state with *home*. Owing to its essentially

²⁰ The expression of a possessor to the right of the word for 'home' in a construct state-like construction should, however, be possible even in languages without overt N-to-D movement, if such languages independently allow overt instances of N-movement to an intermediate position lower than, say, adjectival phrases, but higher than some position for genitive arguments. This situation has been suggested to arise precisely in the Continental Germanic languages (Longobardi, in press). Therefore, it might not be due to chance that traces of the construct state pattern of Romance *casa* are found with the N-genitive order in some such varieties. Thus, a construct state usage of the word etymologically corresponding to English *house* might historically underlie the Scandinavian preposition *hos*, essentially meaning 'chez', and could still be instantiated in the Dutch construction *in huize* + FAMILY NAME: in the latter, as insightfully pointed out to me by Aafke Hulk, the noun *huis* cannot be preceded by an article and displays a phonologically peculiar inflection.

covert nature, it is less detectable on the surface, if we except the lack of the article; but otherwise it displays all the basic properties assigned by UG to this construction.

In this light, consider the further peculiarity of determinerless *home* instantiated by cases like (25c): unlike all other English place nouns, it seems to be able to semantically incorporate an invisible locative preposition, so as to achieve the distribution and meaning of a PP or a locative adverb. Given its appearance precisely with *home*, it is not implausible that this property may be somehow linked with the construct state in a typologically and theoretically significant way. Let me speculate on this point.

Suppose, for instance, that a null locative P may be licensed in some languages, subject to a universal identification condition requiring this P to be incorporated into a place noun. Given standard assumptions about incorporation (see Baker 1988) and some version of the Head Movement Constraint (see Travis 1984), a noun embedded within a DP could incorporate into a P only after previously raising to D⁰, namely, to the head that is the direct complement of such a P. This would limit the possibility of licensing a null locative P, in the unmarked case, to nouns overtly or covertly raising to D, like certain proper place names and *home/casa*. Some interesting examples of this peculiarity are found in Romance as well; in modern Veneto dialects the preposition *a*, normally introducing locative and directional complements, is dropped precisely before raised *casa*.

- (28) Vago casa (mia).
 I am going home (my)

Hence, the possibility of being introduced by an invisible locative preposition is another by-product of the construct state pattern of such nouns.²¹

5 The Syntax of *Chez*

As I have said, present-day *chez* is recognized as a locative preposition and not as a noun in French grammars. This may appear to be a straightforward analysis in light of a number of properties distinguishing its usage from that of all regular nouns in French. Such differences are obvious: for example, *chez* never cooccurs with a determiner or is followed by a PP (e.g., of the genitival *de* + DP form). Less obvious but more crucial for supporting a prepositional analysis

²¹ With respect to the licensing role of N-raising, additional evidence in this direction is provided by the fact that in languages as diverse as the modern Veneto dialects, Latin, and Ancient Greek, the prepositions naming locative and directional relations (e.g., *a* in Venetian; *ad, in* in Latin; *eis, en* in Greek) disappear not only before the word for 'home' but also before the proper names of cities and 'small islands' (both Latin and Greek add very few isolated common nouns and tend to use peculiar inflections or affixes for such cases, often survivals of ancient locative case morphology). Therefore, this class is largely coextensive precisely with that of nouns raising to D in Modern Italian, as is discussed in more detail in Longobardi 1997. This possibility must somehow be limited to object-referring raising nouns, such as *casa* and proper geographic names, in order to avoid incorrectly extending the option to all other nouns argued in Longobardi 1996 to raise to D—for example, all Semitic construct state nouns or Germanic nouns modified by a Saxon genitive. However, the latter nouns have been argued in Longobardi 1996 to adjoin to a segmentally null article in D. The resulting head could thus project the semantic properties of a regular determiner (an operator) rather than those of a place noun, thereby failing to license a locative preposition. Of course, being a referential place name is not a sufficient condition, without overt or covert raising, to license an empty P.

are, however, the properties distinguishing *chez* from construct state versions of *casa* in the other Romance languages.

To a first approximation, these differences are at least five in number. (1) *Chez* is now endowed with an inherent locative meaning, as if it contained an incorporated invisible preposition. (2) In the standard language it tends to be excluded from regular subject and object positions; that is, it has the actual distribution of locative PPs. (3) There are no alternations between phrases of the form *chez* + DP and phrases of the form D + *chez* + P + DP. (4) Pronominal expressions following it take the form not of possessives but of oblique pronouns. (5) As noted earlier, at least since the seventeenth century *chez* has been able to designate an abstract location, synchronically not reconcilable with any meaning like 'home', 'house', or 'household'. These properties are manifested in the following examples:

(29) Je suis/vais *chez* mes parents.
I am/am going *chez* my parents

(30) ?*J'ai vu *chez* Marie.
I saw *chez* Marie

(31) a. Je viens de *chez* mes parents.
I am coming from *chez* my parents (= from my parents' place)
b. *Je viens de la *chez* de mes parents.
I am coming from the *chez* of my parents

(32) a. Je viens de *chez* lui/eux.
I am coming from *chez* him/them (= at his/their place)
b. *Je viens de *chez* sien(ne)/leur.
I am coming from *chez* his/their

(33) *Chez* Platon, Socrate nous apparaît comme l'homme le plus sage et juste
in Plato Socrates appears to us as the wisest and most honest man
du monde. (= (4))
in the world

All these properties are shared by many prepositions, in French and in Romance more generally. On these grounds, the categorial analysis of *chez* as a preposition is empirically well corroborated and, I believe, ultimately correct.

However, especially in colloquial French, the behavior of *chez* remains relatively close to that of a construct state noun. Strictly speaking, the really compelling piece of evidence against just assuming a synchronic analysis of modern *chez* as a construct state noun is (32b). The rest of the evidence is suggestive but, in fact, less decisive than it may seem at first sight. Let me review it with care.

The inherent locative meaning of *chez* in (29) was shown in the previous section to characterize *casa* in other Romance dialects and another synonymous noun arguably subject to a related process of construct state (namely, English *home*) and was thus regarded as a crosslinguistically plausible option for raising nouns designating places.

In turn, I have found (30) and analogous sentences actually not completely impossible in colloquial and dialectal French for some speakers. Furthermore, (34a), acceptable for virtually all speakers, is potentially ambiguous (*chez* N may be a dislocated subject or place adverbial); and some dialectal cases of *chez* occurring unambiguously in argument position, such as (34b), cited by (e.g.) Nyrop (1930:96), are still sporadically accepted with the meaning of ‘family, household’ and plural agreement *ad sensum*.

- (34) a. Chez Paul, c’est très beau.
 at Paul’s/Paul’s home it’s very nice
 b. Chez (les) Dubois sont partis.
 the Dubois left

Next, notice that the paradigm in (31) is not decisive either; it does not differ in status from its Catalan counterpart in (35), whose first example is an obvious case of the construct state, in the analysis developed here.

- (35) a. Vinc de ca’ls meus pares.
 I am coming from home my parents
 b. *Vinc de la ca’ dels meus pares.
 I am coming from the home of my parents

In other words, the phonological reduction to *ca’* is bound to cooccur with all the other properties of the construct state in Catalan, as in Semitic, as we have seen.²² The same could be true for French, in principle, with the only crucial difference that grammaticality can be restored in Catalan (35b) simply by replacing *ca’* with the full alternant *casa*, while in French, as we know, this alternative does not exist.²³

²² For a few analogical extensions in other varieties, see footnotes 16 and 19.

²³ If anything, it is necessary to resort to a lexically unrelated word like *maison* ‘home, house’ < Latin MANSIO-NE(M). Interestingly enough, this word displays dialectal developments with some characteristics of *chez*, in particular in northern Gallo-Romance varieties, such as Piccard and Walloon (see, e.g., von Wartburg 1940:241). According to the data reported in Remacle (1952–1960), *mon*, a reduced form of Walloon *mâhon* (La Gleize) or *mahone* (Liège), is followed by a nonprepositional possessor but normally preceded by a still visible preposition.

- (i) a. amon Blêse
 at home Blaise
 b. amon le doctêur
 at home the doctor
 (ii) a. devant mon Blêse
 in front of home Blaise
 b. d’mon Blêse
 from home Blaise

The *a-* preceding *mon* in (i) seems to be an incorporated preposition of the type found in the OF spelling *enchies*. Von Wartburg (1940:242) also reports a few cases where *mon* seems to be used without the preposition, hence in a way presumably analogous to *casa* in the Veneto dialects mentioned in the text. I am indebted to Judy Bernstein for pointing out these data to me and for discussing their relevance.

- (36) a. Vinc de la *casa* dels meus pares.
 I am coming from the home of my parents
 b. *Je viens de la *chèse* de mes parents.
 I am coming from the home of my parents

This contrast would thus reduce to nothing else than the well-known lexical gap produced in French by the change in (5a), and (31) by itself does not choose between the analyses of *chez* as a preposition or as a construct state noun.

Finally, even the phenomenon illustrated in (32a), the presence of a pronoun complement in a form different from a regular agreeing possessive adjective, is not an immediate and completely decisive sign of prepositional rather than nominal complementation, for pronominal forms as genitive complements of construct state *casa/ca'* may occur in special nonagreeing forms in certain Catalan dialects, as we have seen in (21).²⁴

In colloquial French we are thus left with (32b) (and perhaps (33))²⁵ as the most uncontroversial evidence for the prepositional analysis. Although this seems sufficient for the synchronic interpretation of *chez* as a preposition, it is also true that its syntax bears significant similarities to a construct state and in certain stylistic varieties it may still behave like a noun.

The construct state noun analysis is even more tempting for OF *chies* because the latter seems not yet to have acquired the abstract reading of (33) and because an independent preposition was still visible in certain OF forms such as *a ch(i)es/en ch(i)es* 'at home/in home', sometimes also orthographically incorporated into the noun.

Furthermore, Tobler and Lommatzsch (1936:s.v.) report at least the following quotation, from Brunetto Latini's *Li livres dou tresor* 46 (edition Chabaille, Paris 1863), in which *chies* seems to lend itself to an obvious nominal interpretation:²⁶

²⁴ Of course, this presupposes that the form of such pronouns may count as (nondistinct from) "genitive" in the language's Case system. Consider, in this light, some speculations about observations by Lagerquist (1993). According to Lagerquist, the occurrence of OF *chies* followed by a personal pronoun, as in Modern French *chez lui*, first established itself between the thirteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century. By contrast, the interrogative/relative pronoun *cui* seems to occur with *chies* since much earlier times. As pointed out to me by Aafke Hulk, this surprising asymmetry could be explained by supposing that personal pronouns like *luille* (OF *luilli*) have never been classified as nondistinct from genitive (unlike the Catalan nonagreeing possessives *meu* and *naltrus*, discussed earlier in the text and in footnote 17) and therefore can occur only in real prepositional environments, not after nominal *chies*. By contrast, *cui*, perhaps by virtue of its also being used as an adnominal genitive form (see Foulet 1928:179–184), would have satisfied the Case conditions even before a prepositional reanalysis of *chies*. If correct, this view may imply that *chez lui* of Modern French is, indeed, evidence for the prepositional analysis and that the recategorization of *chies* among French speakers/writers must have begun precisely around the thirteenth century and taken over completely before the sixteenth.

²⁵ (33) is compatible with an ambiguous categorial analysis and its relevance is dubious anyway; for, even though the abstract meaning is a general feature of prepositions, it is sporadically available to some concrete nouns, in metaphoric interpretations (see the discussion in section 8).

²⁶ Tobler and Lommatzsch (1936:s.v.) also cite the following example, where *chies* takes one of the typical OF forms of adnominal complementation used to express possession, namely, a PP headed by *a*:

- (i) *chies a un bourgeois*
 home at a bourgeois
 'at the home of a bourgeois'

- (37) La place de terre ou Florence siet fu jadis apelee chiés de Mars, ce est a dire
 the piece of land where Florence lies was once called *chiés* of Mars that is to say
 maisons de bataille.
 home of battle

In sum, standard criteria of internal reconstruction, even in the absence of the comparative and Latin evidence, would suggest that Modern French *chez* may derive from an older nominal construction with the properties of the construct state. Comparing the conclusions from French with the evidence of the previous section, then, the resulting picture is a familiar one in the historical-comparative framework: a group of related languages displays a phenomenon with partially but significantly similar properties; furthermore, the similarities increase the farther back one goes into the early history of each language. This is the case in the history of French, as we have just seen, but also in the history of Italian, considering that in early texts, especially of Tuscan origin, the construct state of *casa* appears with a full-fledged range of genitival DP complements, exactly as (e.g.) in Modern Catalan.

It looks plausible, then, that the isogloss of raising *casa*, with the general properties assigned to it by UG, ultimately dates back to a common Proto-Romance source at a very early, prehistoric stage of development. If these conclusions are correct, the foregoing discussion provides a significant example of classical historical-comparative reconstruction of a fragment of a protosyntax (pace Lightfoot 1979, but in agreement with (e.g.) Harris and Campbell 1995 and Roberts's (1996) review thereof).

6 Phonology Regularized

To summarize, the evidence reviewed in the previous sections leads to two conclusions: (1) that most Romance varieties, hence perhaps even a predocumentary common Romance stage, exhibit a construct state construction for the word historically corresponding to Latin *CASA*(M); and (2) that such a phenomenon is properly characterized by principles of UG (discussed in detail in Longobardi 1996) from which the following three theorems can be deduced:

- (38) *Informal theorems of UG*
- a. If a common noun raises to D, replacing the article, a prepositionless genitive must occur (also vice versa in all the modern Romance literary varieties).²⁷
 - b. Every DP has one and only one phrasal stress, which falls on the rightmost non-oblique (i.e., prepositionally case-marked) noun of the DP.
 - c. An empty locative P is licensed only if targeted by N-movement (i.e., by locative lexical features).

²⁷ Concerning the type *La Chaise-Dieu* (see footnote 1): in examples like this, the lack of a genitive preposition introducing the possessor along with the survival of the article must not be surprising: OF is known to have used the nonprepositional *cas régime* to express the genitive relation at least in the case of external arguments of N without the latter having to raise to D and replace the determiner (see Foulet 1928).

(38b), however correct its literal formulation, is particularly important at this point: in fact, along with the independent observation that it is the noun *casa* and essentially only *casa* that enters a *gemeinromanisch* construct state construction, (38b) provides a principled and typologically systematic reason for the fact that an apparently irregular phonological development affected precisely the Romance outcomes of CASA(M), yielding *calcas* beside *casa* and *chez* instead of **chèse*. It was only this word that could undergo a syntactically predictable allomorphic variation, so that the source for the various modern reduced forms must have been an already reduced Proto-Romance allomorph CA(S). This conclusion thus reconciles these developments with the hypothesis of regular sound change, solving the problem (5b) above and remedying the first and second inadequacies of the etymologies discussed in section 3. It remains to be seen how one can remedy the third inadequacy, getting closer to an explanation for the further surprising properties of French *chez* that its counterparts in the other languages do not share.

7 The Necessity of the Categorical Shift

Let us turn now to the other changes listed in (5), repeated here for convenience.

- (5) a. Lexical = CASA(M)/CHIESE > \emptyset
 b. Phonological = CASA(M) > *CAS > *chies* > *chez*
 c. Categorical = N > P
 d. Semantic = 'home' > 'generalized and abstract location'

The salient property of the three changes (5a,c,d) is that all of them occur in French but none of them occurs in any of the cognate languages. This may suggest that they form some sort of typological cluster.

Let me now approach the problem from the most syntactic of the three changes, the one in (5c). As noted earlier, the evidence for a prepositional analysis of *chez* is rather subtle even for a linguist investigating Modern French. A fortiori, the evidence available to a child for the reanalysis of OF *chies* (or perhaps its Proto-French predecessor) from N to P must have been at least as meager.

Thus, logically, it must have been the case that at the relevant historical stage the primary evidence became undecidable (i.e., equally meager in either direction), but that some principle of the LAD has since favored an analysis of *chez* as a P over one as a (construct state) N on a priori grounds.

Let us then consider the following acquisition principle:

- (39) Minimize feature content.

Let us also assume that a positive specification for even just one of the $\pm N, \pm V$ features characterizing lexical categories in the generative tradition (see Stowell 1981) entails the addition of richer feature content than does a negative specification of both features. In other words, the total content of $-N, -V$ items (i.e., prepositions) would be lower than that of nouns ($+N, -V$), verbs ($-N, +V$), and adjectives ($+N, +V$) in terms of both formal and semantic features. This simply formalizes the traditional intuition that nouns, verbs, and adjectives are "open" classes, richer

in lexical content than prepositions, since they enter into more articulated systems of semantic and morphological oppositions. In these terms, a shift from N to P instantiates a classical case of feature simplification or grammaticalization (loss of lexical content).²⁸

Given (39), P will be the unmarked categorial choice among the four major lexical categories, whenever positive evidence to the contrary is absent.²⁹ We must then consider what may count as such evidence, in particular in the case of nouns.

In principle, the empirical strategies a language learner uses for choosing N rather than P in the process of learning categorial features can be based on three distinct types of evidence:

- (40) a. Distributional evidence
 b. Inflectional evidence
 c. Paradigmatic evidence

Let me examine the evidence available in the present case from this point of view.

It is true that at first sight the distributional evidence for a nominal analysis of *chies* may look stronger than the evidence for a prepositional analysis, but on closer inspection it proves hardly decisive. Especially after raising of *chies* had triggered the possibility of licensing an empty locative P, the only crucial evidence distinguishing between the two analyses in favor of the nominal one consisted of (1) occurrences of *chies* in *unmistakably* DP positions (e.g., subject and object), and (2) the possible cooccurrence of *chies* within its DP with nominal determiners, inflected possessives, or attributive adjectives.

The first case corresponds to examples like (30) or (34b). Now, it is a fact (though still an unexplained one) that raising of *casa* to D is limited to DPs embedded as complements of prepositions in some Romance varieties (e.g., in the colloquial Italian of several northern speakers) and that even in those varieties where the phenomenon is in principle freely generalized to all environments, its occurrence in prepositional ones is statistically overwhelming. This is the case, for instance, in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, as clarified by the research mentioned in section 4. In other words, prepositions often seem to have a crucial role in selecting an N-attracting D. Therefore, it is not unlikely that distributional evidence of type (1) was hardly available in the relevant period of French. Surviving cases such as (34b) may have come to be marked as archaic or dialectal, owing to their less-than-standard frequency, and they remain so marked in the present-day sociolinguistic situation.

As for the second case, cooccurrence with determiners is obviously out of the question, owing to the raising nature of construct state nouns. We have already seen evidence from Catalan that inflected possessives are not the only necessary expression of a construct state genitive argument. And attributive adjectives cooccur very rarely with Romance construct state *casa*: few

²⁸ Ian Roberts suggests that the fact that P is the least "costly" category in terms of (39) emerges even more clearly in an underspecified form of classification, where $N=N$, $V=V$, $A=V,N$, but $P=0$.

²⁹ Alternatively and equally well, one could consider that the prepositional choice allows a child to postulate less invisible structure for the phrases in question, dispensing with the longer chain of empty heads required under the construct state noun hypothesis. If "shorter chains" are indeed favored, as suggested for example by Clark and Roberts (1993), the analysis of *chez* as a P will again impose itself.

adjectives are fully grammatical with Modern Italian raised *casa*, virtually none in Catalan; in Boccaccio's text no relevant example is found containing an adjective.

Thus, the distributional evidence in favor of a nominal (i.e., diachronically conservative) analysis of *chies* is likely to have been virtually reduced to zero.³⁰ Next let us consider inflectional evidence, that is, the possibility of recognizing a category from the morphological expression of its particular inflectional categories. From this viewpoint, Romance prepositions contrast with the other three major lexical categories by being typically uninflected (invariable). OF nouns instead were potentially inflected for gender, number, and case. Gender was obviously intrinsic for most nouns, clearly at least for inanimate ones, *CASA(M)* and its developments normally being feminine. No variation could then show up. As for number, it has been noted (Longobardi 1995, 1996) that only singular occurrences of Romance special common nouns like *casa* can raise to D, exactly as in the case of proper names. In other words, only singular head nouns can occur in the construct state in Romance, for the principled reasons discussed in Longobardi 1996. Therefore, no variation in number was detectable for *chies*, signaling it as a noun. As for case, only masculine nouns exhibited relevant alternations. In sum, neither inflectional variation nor the presence of any specific ending could distinguish *chies* from a preposition. This disposes of (40b), inflectional evidence.³¹

At this point there remains only one reasonable way for a child to be forced to abandon the minimal (from the viewpoint of feature content) hypothesis suggested by principle (39), that *chies* is a P. Namely, the child must recognize that *chies* (or its correspondent *calcas* in the other Romance varieties) is just a regular allomorph in the paradigm of an otherwise unequivocally nominal form, that is, a form recognizable as nominal on the basis of distributional or inflectional evidence. This is what I have called "paradigmatic evidence" in (40c).

It is evident that all the other Romance languages do provide such evidence in the form of their productive alternation between *calcas* and *casa*; but as we have seen, in French *chiese* had essentially disappeared from regular usage by the time of the earliest texts (change (5a)). Thus, paradigmatic evidence was crucially available in the rest of Romance, but not in French, owing precisely to (5a). This means that we may automatically reduce change (5c) to change (5a); the bare assumption of principle (39) explains why the categorial reanalysis from N to P took place in French and only in French.

Now, we must try to reduce change (5d) as well to change (5a), either directly or indirectly (i.e., through (5c)). If we can do this, we will subsume the whole cluster of changes opposing

³⁰ In order to completely dispose of the distributional evidence, one must suppose that analogical extensions of the weak form *chies* to non-construct state environments, of the Italian and Ibero-Romance types discussed in footnotes 16 and 19, were virtually absent in OF; this assumption is plausible both empirically (because the only such examples mentioned in dictionaries are (37) and perhaps (i) of footnote 26) and conceptually (because change (5a) must have deprived OF of the model for analogy, namely, the full allomorph *chiese*).

³¹ It is also possible that inflectional evidence alone would in any event be insufficient to override (39), as a general property of diachronic theory. Consider, among other examples, cases such as the reanalysis into an invariable preposition of Italian *mediante* 'by means of', which must have been a verbal participle originally meaning 'mediating' and used in absolute constructions presumably agreeing normally in number with its argument. The implications of this aspect of the theory of grammatical change go well beyond the limits of the present case study.

French to the rest of Romance under the conjunction of a primitive change, (5a), and of principle (39). Actually, it seems that virtually all spatial prepositions of Modern French display a generalized and abstract meaning and are not confined to applying to actual locations. For example, consider the abstract reading of the prepositions in the following PPs:

- (41) a. sur ce sujet
about this topic
b. dans cette perspective
in this perspective
c. a cet égard
from this viewpoint
d. de mon côté
for my part
e. par de rudes épreuves
through hard experiences
f. sous cet aspect
under this aspect

Examples of this sort could easily be multiplied. One can infer that at least in French, but probably in other languages as well, spatial prepositions are ambiguously specified for the feature [+/-abstract], while this is certainly not the case for place nouns, despite the existence of a few that can indeed be used either concretely or abstractly (think, for just one famous example, of Greek *tópos* ‘place’ but also ‘commonplace’, ‘literary or rhetorical device’, and so on).

Therefore, when *chez* became a spatial preposition as a consequence of (5c), it would have assumed the same feature constitution as the whole class of French spatial prepositions, including the option of being [+abstract].³²

In this way, (5d) is reduced to (5a) via (5c). Thus, the occurrence of (5a) seems a sufficient condition for the occurrence of both changes (5c,d) and, given the nonoccurrence of the latter in the rest of Romance, probably a necessary one as well.³³

³² Thus, it appears that, once *chez* has been integrated into the well-established class of prepositions, its properties have been completely generalized and regularized according to the new classification. By contrast, its correspondents in other Romance varieties, which have remained within the already peculiar and restricted class of construct state nouns, have often displayed a tendency to pick up more and more idiosyncratic features even with respect to the general pattern expected of this class: recall, for example, the peculiar restrictions on the type of overt genitive following *casa* in Modern Italian. This comparison may suggest that, in general, being part of an already idiosyncratic class of items leads to acquiring even more idiosyncratic features, while reanalysis into a more productive pattern (category) leads to complete regularization with respect to that pattern. In other words, idiosyncrasy would tend to pile up on the same few items in the lexicon of a language. This would follow from an acquisition theory whose evaluation measure counts as marked (i.e., disfavored) units not single idiosyncratic features but lexical items containing (any number of) such features.

³³ If the latter conclusion is correct, it will follow that reduced forms of Latin MANSIONE(M), like Walloon *mon* mentioned in footnote 23, are still construct state nouns and have not been reanalyzed as prepositions since they alternate with a full form *mâhon*. The accuracy of this prediction can hardly be decided from the available empirical material; the only decisive evidence would probably be the possibility of cooccurrence with an agreeing adjective or possessive, for which I have no example at hand.

8 The Primitive Change

At this point we seem to be left with (5a) as the single primitive change responsible for the whole French cluster. Do we have some plausible external justification (say, of a sociolinguistic nature) for (5a), in order to attribute the primitive change to some grammar-external factor? Probably not. However, notice that (5a) could already be encompassed in Inertial Theory, taking the dropping of a lexical item to amount to the reduction of its semantic or phonological features to zero.

More importantly, it is possible to speculate on the typological relation by looking at a further change clearly affecting the semantic features of another lexical item: for the Romance domain where (5a) took place (i.e., Gallo-Romania) roughly coincides with the domain where the normal words for ‘home, house’ derive not from CASA(M) but from a different Latin basis, namely, MANSIONE(M) in the north and HOSPITALE in the south.³⁴ Though *ALF* was not primarily conceived as a syntactic atlas, a careful look at its maps provides suggestive information. Comparison of map 276 in fasc. 6 (*chez nous*) with map 801 in fasc. 19 (*une maison*) reveals at least that the area where some phonetic variant of Standard French *chez* in its apparently prepositional usage is found is properly included in, and largely coincides with, the area where the word for ‘home, house’ is not a development of CASA(M) but a development of MANSIONE(M) or HOSPITALE (like *maison*, *ustal*, and their variants).³⁵

In sum, it seems that the French cluster of diachronic changes initiated by (5a) took place within the domain where either of the following semantic shifts occurred in Late Latin:

- (42) a. *mansio*: ‘stay’ > ‘estate’ > ‘home’
 b. *hospitale*: ‘guestroom’ > ‘lodge’ > ‘home’

This geographic correlation suggests that a causal relationship between changes (5a) and (42) is likely to exist, although it does not tell much about its direction. However, the chronology of the two events (*mansio* is attested in the new reading as early as the fourth century in Gaul, while some of the above-mentioned sporadic traces of *chiese* < CASA(M) date from as late as the fourteenth century) suggests that the rise of *mansio* in its new meaning, with its increased frequency of use, must have reduced the presence of *casa* in the primary linguistic data of Gallo-Romance learners to the point of marking it with an “archaic” sociolinguistic connotation and leading to its disappearance.

This ordering of the relation between (42) and the changes listed in (5) is made more plausible

³⁴ See Stefenelli 1992:148 regarding CASA: “vor allem in Nordgallien wird es seinerseits [i.e., after it replaced Classical Latin *domus*] sekundär durch MANSIO (seit 4 Jh., > fr. *maison*), im Okzitanischen durch HOSPITALE überlagert” (‘first of all in northern Gaul it is in turn secondarily overlapped by MANSIO (since the 4th century, > Fr. *maison*), in Occitan by HOSPITALE’). I am grateful to Mario Eusebi for pointing out this work to me.

³⁵ Actually, developments of CASA(M) shown on map 801 are found only at the borders with the Italian and Catalan linguistic domains, namely, in the Alpes Maritimes, the Pyrénées Orientales (including the essentially Catalan-speaking Roussillon), and the extreme south of Haute Garonne. Also see Lagerquist 1993:57: “Les continuateurs du nom *casa* qui avait remplacé *domus* en Gaule avaient été refoulés vers des régions isolées ou limitrophes sous la pression de *mansione* dans le nord et *hospitale* dans le sud” (‘The continuations of the noun *casa* that had replaced *domus* in Gaul had been driven toward isolated or borderline regions under the pressure of *mansione* in the North and *hospitale* in the South’).

by a chronological correlation: the dating of the disappearance of *chiese* around the fourteenth century significantly coincides with the approximate dating of the categorial reanalysis (5c) as occurring between the thirteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century, based on the considerations of footnote 24.

We may now add (42) to the original cluster (5a–d) of specifically Gallo-Romance changes and tentatively assume that these relevant diachronic shifts, now numbering five, are all reduced to a single primitive one, (42) itself.

I am presently unable to trace this potential primitive to extragrammatical factors (e.g., some change in the social/urban structure of Christianized Gallo-Romania), but I believe that the results achieved so far already represent a major step toward solving a minute but puzzling etymological issue in many Romance varieties and toward explaining a set of a priori unrelated changes in the history of French.

Notice that no independent parameter resetting at all takes place in the fragment of syntactic history sketched here, and even the syntactic change (5c) (a change in the formal features of a single lexical item) can be viewed as merely the secondary consequence of a change in the lexical semantics of another item.

This way, on the basis of the limited empirical domain considered here, we may apparently defend a portion of a near optimal theory of diachronic change: (1) phonological change is largely regular (*ausnahmslos*) where not subject to the pressure of morpholexical paradigms (*analogy*); (2) syntactic change does not exist as a primitive (the Inertial Theory), but can be reduced to independent changes in the phonological or semantic interfaces of individual lexical items; hopefully, the latter will ultimately be traced, in many cases, to extragrammatical causal factors (interference, social changes, etc.).

9 Conclusions

The amount of explanatory success attained here can be viewed from two complementary perspectives: that of the *theoretical* explanation of certain diachronic phenomena and that of the *historical* explanation of the resulting synchronic states.

The logical structure of the explanation is one and the same, of course: some general principles of UG and the LAD (in particular, something like (39) and the principles governing the typological phenomenon of the construct state), conjoined with certain initial conditions (most notably the existence of a construct state pattern for *gemeinromanisch* *CASA and the loss of the direct continuation of this form in Gallo-Romance in favor of other Latin bases), allow the logical deduction of the observed changes and their final outputs (e.g., the Modern French situation).

But this explanatory structure can be regarded, as is often the case, from two slightly different viewpoints, according to whether we take the universal principles for granted and focus instead on the informational novelty of the initial (i.e., historical) conditions, or vice versa. Let us say that the former case involves *historical* (or *genetic*) explanation (typical for evolutionary phenomena in both human and natural sciences and best exemplified by the results of the historical-comparative method in linguistics), and the latter involves a *theoretical* one, the sort, for example, most current in generative grammatical research.

In this article I have tried to provide both a theoretical explanation for the changes attested in French and a genetic (namely etymological, in this case) explanation, based on the reconstruction of a construct state pattern in Proto-Romance and Proto-French (essentially an application of the historical-comparative approach to a syntactic construction), for the particular outcome of such developments.

Although the present approach is imperfect, it seems to yield advances toward explanatory adequacy in either direction. It suggests that comparative and internal reconstruction of syntactic patterns is possible and may provide nontrivial historical explanations for peculiar synchronic phenomena crosslinguistically emerging in cognate languages. At the same time, the observed diachronic facts are well explained within a very restrictive theory of language change (the Inertial Theory) and therefore corroborate it.

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Abbreviations

- ALF: *Atlas linguistique de la France*, by J. Gilliéron and E. Edmont (1902–1912).
- CGL: *Corpus glossariorum latinorum*, ed. by G. Goetz. Leipzig: Teubner (1888). (Reprinted Amsterdam: Hakkert (1965).)
- TLF: *Trésor de la langue française, dictionnaire de la langue du XIX et XX siècle (1789–1960)*. Paris: CNRS.

Università di Trieste
Scienze della Formazione
 Via Tigor 22
 I-34124 Trieste
 Italy
 longbard@univ.trieste.it

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