

Chapter 26

Saussure's Dilemma: Parole and its potential

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Saussure's account of the transformation of Latin to French stress leads to the unintended conclusion that *parole* has a life of its own: parole persists even after it is no longer dictated by *langue*; *parole* can prevent change or, conversely, presage potential change. Saussure's example is paralleled by intrusive *r* (*Cuba[r]against your friends*, not **day[r]and*) and the competition of *napron* and its near twin, and eventual successor, *apron*. *Parole* lives.

1 Saussure's Dilemma

It seems only fitting to begin this tribute to Steve Anderson, friend and erstwhile UCLA colleague, historian of linguistics and confirmed *helvétophile*, with Ferdinand de Saussure and his discussion of the history of stress from Latin to French (Chapter III.4–6 of the *Course*). That history presents a dilemma for Saussure's separation of synchrony from diachrony and linguistic activity (*parole*) from system (*système*, *langue*).

Here is Saussure's account of the transition from (ante)penultimate stress in Latin to final stress in French:

In French, the accent always falls on the last syllable unless this syllable contains a mute *e* (*ə*). This is a synchronic fact, a relation between the whole set of French words and accent. What is its source? A previous state. Latin had a different and more complicated system of accentuation: the accent was on the penultimate syllable when the latter was long; when short, the accent fell back on the antepenult (cf. *amīcus*, *ánima*). The Latin law suggests relations that are in no way analogous to the French law. Doubtless the accent is the same in the sense that it remained in the same position; in French words it always falls on the syllable that had it in Latin: *amīcum* → *ami*, *ánimam* → *âme*. But the two formulas are different for the two moments because the forms of the words changed. We know that everything after the accent either disappeared or was reduced to mute *e*. As a result of the alteration of the word, the position of the accent with respect to the whole was



no longer the same; subsequently speakers, conscious of the new relation, instinctively put the accent on the last syllable, even in borrowed words introduced in their written forms (*facile, consul, ticket, burgrave*, etc.). Speakers obviously did not try to change systems, to apply a new formula, since in words like *amícum* → *ami*, the accent always remained on the same syllable; but speakers changed the position of the accent without having a hand in it. A law of accentuation, like everything that pertains to the linguistic system, is an arrangement of terms, a fortuitous and involuntary result of evolution. (Saussure 1959: 86)

To explain modern French final stress, Saussure goes back to its source in Latin, or rather to a stage of Romance subsequent to classical Latin but much earlier than modern French. He first defines the stress rules for French (final) and Latin ((ante)penultimate, depending on the quantity of the penult). That done, Saussure mentions in passing that the position of stress in French preserves the original position of stress from Latin, and illustrates the claim with examples of the two subcases of Latin stress, on a long penultimate (*amícum* → *ami*) and on the antepenultimate when the penult is short (*ánimam* → *âme*). It is worth mentioning that his formulation “the accent is the same in the sense that it remained in the same position” is not original; it repeats a standard observation from French philology in the middle of the nineteenth century. Thus in 1862 Gaston Paris (and seven other scholars he mentions, p. 11) stated the observation that stress falls on the same syllable in French as it did in Latin; for that phenomenon Paris in particular uses the apt term “persistence” (*persistance*) (Paris 1862: 28). Saussure does not use that term, but his formulation echoes this earlier tradition. Saussure then mentions the familiar fact that syllables after the syllable with the “persistent” stress are subject to stress reduction. At this point one might think he is preparing to explain how final stress in French arose, for example, perhaps by generalizing the word-final stress of words like *amícum* → *ami* that had undergone apocope. Saussure does not go in that direction. Instead, he declines to give a linguistic explanation for the development of final stress and places the burden on speakers acting “instinctively” and then on the vague assertion that “a diachronic fact was interposed.” So although Saussure at the outset seemed prepared to explain modern French stress in terms of its source in Latin, the source is not relevant to Saussure’s interpretation. He ends with a summary blaming the chaotic nature of change: “A law of accentuation, like everything that pertains to the linguistic system, is an arrangement of terms, a fortuitous and involuntary result of evolution.”

Saussure seemed to recognize that the Latin rule of (ante)penultimate stress was lost as a rule. Further, it cannot have been a rule of the *système*; had it been rule of the *système*, it would have been maintained. Saussure’s response was this:

The synchronic law is general but not imperative. Doubtless it is imposed on individuals by the weight of collective usage..., but here I do not have in mind an obligation on the part of speakers. I mean that in language no force guarantees the maintenance of a regularity when established on some point. Being a simple expression of an existing arrangement, the synchronic law reports a state of affairs; it is like a law that states that trees in a certain orchard are arranged in the shape

of a quincunx. And the arrangement that the law defines is precarious precisely because it is not imperative. Nothing is more regular than the synchronic law that governs Latin accentuation...; but the accentual rule did not resist the forces of alteration and gave way to a new law, the one of French... In short, if one speaks of law in synchrony, it is in the sense of an arrangement, a principle of regularity. (Saussure 1959: 92–93)

This analysis, developed in connection with a discussion of six facts of Indo-European, is here applied to the Latin stress rule, which was downgraded to a descriptive observation about behavior maintained by social convention, analogous to the rule stating that “the trees in a certain orchard are arranged in the shape of a quincunx.”

The phenomenon of Latin stress, with its properties of persistence, precariousness, and regularity presented a dilemma for Saussure. The phenomenon of persistence implies that usage (*parole*) has a life of its own; *parole* is maintained as *parole*, as habit, transmitted by imitation from one generation to the next. To invoke a metaphor, substituting “language” for “body” in Newton’s first law, we could say: “a language at rest remains at rest unless it is acted on by an external force.” Usage, such as the Latin stress rule, can exhibit coherent patterns (such as the elegant parallelism of length of the penultimate and antepenultimate position). Moreover, the patterns of *parole* are capable of defining the conditions for change (such as the “persistent” location of stress after Latin which conditions post-tonic apocope), and in this way patterns of *parole* act like elements of *système*.

Saussure’s dilemma was that the more he insisted on the dominant, special, pure exclusionary status of *système*, the more ethereal and abstract system became, and that had the paradoxical effect of elevating *parole* to be the object of investigation.

2 “Law and Order” and sandhi doublets

To document the fate of /r/ in weak position (after a vowel, not before a vowel), Kurath & McDavid (1961) divided the eastern seaboard into four discontinuous zones, two northern and two southern, in which /r/ becomes [ɹ] in weak position: northern – including New England (Connecticut River east) and metropolitan New York; southern – including Upper South (Virginia, into northern North Carolina) and Lower South (South Carolina, Georgia). The four zones are separated by transitional belts which retain some form of *r* (presumably American [ɹ] or “velarized constricted” *r* [ɹ̠]). The largest of the transitional belts is Pennsylvania, from which rhoticism spread to Midwest and Midland dialects.

The discussion here focuses on the northern zones, which Kurath & McDavid (1961) treated as a single zone. As shown in Table 1, in the north /r/ is reflected in weak position as [ɹ] after mid and high vowels ([i, u, e, o]). After low vowels ([a/ɐ, ɒ/ɔ] and here [ə] as well) what must have been the earlier reflex [ɹ] was lost or absorbed by the vowel.

Table 1: Postvocalic rhotic reflexes, North

| high/mid V | low V |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| [ir], [ur], [er], [or] > | [ar/ɐr], [ɔr/ɔr], [ɜr] > |
| [iə], [uə], [eə], [oə] | [aə], [ʊə/ɔə], [ə] > |
| <i>ear</i> [iə] | [a/ɐ], [ʊ/ɔ], [ə] |
| <i>poor</i> [puə] | <i>far</i> [fa/fɐ] |
| <i>care</i> [keə] | <i>for</i> [fɔ/fɔ] |
| <i>four</i> [foə] | <i>father</i> [faðə] |

Like northern dialects, southern dialects also absorbed [ə] after low-mid [a/ɐ, ʊ/ɔ, ə]. Furthermore: “In Southern folk speech, /ə/ is often lost, *door*, *four*, *poor* /doə, foə, poə/ thus becoming /do, fo, po/” (Kurath & McDavid 1961: 171a and map #156).¹

Kurath and McDavid devoted special attention to sandhi contexts – contexts in which the word-final vowel which once had /r/ is used in a phrase with a following word. Then the word with original /r/ can be said to have two “sandhi doublets,” depending on whether the second word begins with a consonant (when the original /r/ would have been in weak position) or with a vowel (when the original /r/ would have been prevocalic). They stated: “...*ear*, *poor*, *care*, *four* have... the positional allomorphs /iə ~ iər, puə ~ puər, kəə ~ kəər, foə (fɔə) ~ foər (fɔər)/, and *car*, *for* (stressed), *father* the allomorphs /ka (kə) ~ kar (kər), fɔ (fə) ~ fɔr (fɔr), fað ~ faðər/.” Note the difference between non-low vowels, in which the reflex is [Və(r)], and low vowels, in which the reflex [V(r)] lacks [ə], since [ə] had been absorbed by the preceding low vowel. The idea of calling these doublets (and they provide a notation for doublets) suggests a model of the lexicon in which a lexical item is composed of multiple subunits, which could be written as an ordered pair such as {[iə]/sandhi before consonant; [iər] / sandhi before vowel}. One might, for example, write a doublet for the noun *Cuba* as pronounced by John F. Kennedy in his speech “in the Cuban Missile Crisis” generally as [kubə], as in *and then shall Cuba[ə] be welcomed* (16:07), but [kubər] in phrases such as *Soviet assistance to Cuba[r] and I quote* (4:32) and *turned Cuba[r] against your friends* (15:05).²

Examples constructed in the spirit of Kurath & McDavid (1961) are given in Table 2, top.

It is worth drawing attention to the fact that prevocalic sandhi examples with non-low vowels have the sequence [ər] (p. 171b); as in [iər, puər, kəər (keər), foər (fɔər)] from the list above. The sandhi sequence [VərV] has in effect two segments – [ə] and [r] – which reflect earlier /r/. Both cannot be original. There must have been an antecedent stage of [*irV, *purV, *kærV (*kerV), *forV (*fɔrV)] in sandhi position before a vowel. The [ə] we see now in [iər], etc., had to have been introduced by analogy from other forms to the sandhi forms before vowel.

¹ The lexeme *poor* is treated once as having a mid vowel (171a) and otherwise as a high vowel (170b, 171b, 172a, 172b). (One, also 171b, is ambiguous.)

² <http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/jfk-cuban.htm>.

Table 2: Sandhi /r/ and Intrusive /r/, North

| context | high, mid V | low V |
|--------------------|--|--|
| sandhi [V(ə)rV] | [iə], [uə], [eə], [oə] <i>ear and</i> [iəɾænd] <i>poor and</i> [puəɾænd] <i>care and</i> [keəɾænd] <i>four and</i> [foəɾænd] | [a/ɐ], [ɒ/ɔ], [ə] <i>far and</i> [fɑɾænd] <i>for all</i> [fɒɾəl] <i>father and</i> [faðəɾænd] |
| intrusive [VrV] | [i], [u], [e], [o] <i>three and</i> *[θriɾænd] <i>two and</i> *[tuɾænd] <i>day and</i> *[deɾænd] <i>know it</i> *[nɒɾɪt] | [a/ɐ], [ɒ/ɔ], [ə] <i>ma and</i> [mɑɾænd] <i>law and</i> [lɒɾænd] <i>Martha and</i> [mɑθəɾænd] |

Analogy is relevant to history in another respect (Sóskuthy 2013). Not uncommonly, words that ended originally in low vowels without /r/ acquired a non-etymological, or “intrusive,” /r/ in sandhi, as in the familiar *law and order* [lɒrændɒdə] and other examples in Table 2. As Kurath & McDavid (1961: 172a) state,

On the analogy of such doublets as *for* /fɒ (fɔ) ~ fɔr (fɒr)/, *car* /kɑ (kɐ) ~ kɑr (kɐr)/, and *father* /fɑðə ~ fɑðər/, positional allomorphs ending in /r/ are often created in Eastern New England and Metropolitan New York for words that historically end in the vowels /ɒ ~ ɔ, a ~ ɐ, ə/, as *law*, *ma*, *Martha*. Thus one hears *law and order* /lɒr ənd ɒdə, lɒr ənd ɔdə/, *ma and pa* /mɑr ən(d) pɑ, mɐ ən(d) pɐ/, *Martha and I* /mɑθər (mɐθər) ənd aɪ/.

The examples of intrusive /r/ just cited involved only words which end in a low vowel – that is, they have the same vocalism in the non-sandhi environments as words that originally ended in /r/ but which absorbed the [ə] reflex of /r/; thus *law* /lɒ (lɔ)/ has the same vocalism as originally rhotic words like *for* /fɒ (fɔ)/. But words like *three*, *two*, *day*, *know*, which end in mid and high vowels, differ. Kurath & McDavid (1961: 172b) state:

It is worth noting that after the normally upgliding free vowels /i, u, e, o/, as in *three*, *two*, *day*, *know*, an analogical “intrusive” /r/ never occurs. The reason for this is clear: since /θri, tu, de, no/ do not end like the phrase-final /r/-less allomorphs of *ear*, *poor*, *care*, *four* /iə, puə, keə, foə/, the basis for creating allomorphs ending in /r/ is lacking.

Thus according to Kurath & McDavid (1961), the development of intrusive /r/ involves the comparison of stem shapes, for example [lɒ] with [fɒ], which are similar and permit analogy, as opposed to *three* [θri] with [iə], which are dissimilar and do not permit analogy.

This distribution is interesting. What determines whether analogical intrusive /r/ develops is an arbitrary division of vowels inherited from the previous history of derhoticism; that is to say, a distinction in vowels involved in the earlier history of reflexes of /r/ in weak position continues to have an effect on later developments. Thus *parole* has the property of inertia (*persistance*), so that later changes (such as the analogical development of intrusive /r/) can be sensitive to properties of *parole* that persist. At the same time as *parole* is inertial and conservative, *parole* nevertheless carries with it the possibility of change. Thus original *r*-less words ending in low vowels have the potential to develop an intrusive sandhi /r/, as happened in northern dialects. Conversely, original *r*-full words had the potential to eliminate the second member of the “doublet” in which /r/ reappears in sandhi before a vowel; this is what happened in southern dialects (especially Upper South but even in the Lower South sandhi forms with /r/ are “only half as frequent as the variants without /r/”, Kurath & McDavid 1961: 171b).

Parole, then, is inertial but carries the potential for change. This example is similar to what Saussure said about Latin stress, that it remained on the syllable where it had always been – by convention, or memory, or inertia – but eventually the stress was repositioned.

It might be objected that it would be easy to state a rule inserting /r/ that is sensitive to vowel height; insertion would happen only in position after low vowels. But why low vowels? Low vowels are not universally more likely than other vowels to adopt a phonotactic sequence [VCV] than other vowels. Intrusive /r/ develops only after low vowels because it is only low vowels that offered a model for analogical extension, and that is a distribution that goes back to a prior change; the restriction to low vowels can only be understood by viewing it as the hangover from a previous stage. Moreover, it is not just any consonant that reappears; it is just the one sound /r/. The /r/ can participate in “intrusive” analogy because the /r/, and only the /r/, was carried over from earlier history. The fact that /r/ is involved in analogy at all is a further instance of persistence of *parole*.

3 “Watergate” and its ilk

Against this background I want to discuss how innovations can arise directly out of speech. The word *Watergate* and its derivatives can serve as an illustration. As is familiar, *Watergate* is the name of a complex of five buildings built in Washington, D.C., over the period 1963–1971. An office building in this complex was used by the Democratic National Committee as headquarters leading up to the 1972 election. The Democratic offices suffered a break-in, for which staff members of the Republican administration were later discovered to be responsible. The break-in triggered an embarrassing scandal and, because of the attempt to cover up the original crime, led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon.

A modification of the name for this location keeps being applied to more events, which, like the original Watergate, include at least two events, layers of agency, times, places. The core is the pairing of two events: first, an event carried out in secret and, second, the

fallout, including the embarrassment caused by the event for the participants and perhaps further developments (cover-up, disclosure). The whole scenario is a rich instance of the familiar trope of metonymy, which points to one event – here, the original transgression – which can invoke associated events (here, the fall-out) and the constituents of those events (locus, agents, patients). The name for this complex of events and constituents, which occurred in 1972, is of course *Watergate* – the name for the place is applied to the whole package of events, by the trope of *pars (locus) pro toto* (complex of events – crime, scandal, cover-up, further fall-out). The semantic operations involved in *Watergate* are familiar, banal tropes.

Event complexes similar to the original *Watergate* scenario can be named by the new compound $\{x+gate\}$, where $\{gate\}$ refers to the existence of a scandalous event (and fall-out) and x refers to a focus – a constituent that is central to the events – such as the agent (*Billygate*) or causal entity (*nannygate*) or the patient (*contragate*).

The morphological structure and semantics of the new compound $\{x \text{ “focus”} + gate\}$ “event(s) leading to scandal” seem clear, and it seems clear that the compound is related to the origin *Watergate*. How? Given the apparent overlap of $\{gate\}$ in both, one might imagine that the word *Watergate* was decomposed into two morphemes, $\{water\}$ and $\{gate\}$, and that reanalysis provided the model for neologisms. But this cannot be: by itself “water” does not mean anything in this context; it is not the focus. And for that matter, *gate* doesn’t mean scandal here in the compound *Watergate*. In the original word *Watergate*, there is no division; *Watergate* is the name for the complex as a whole, not for any of its constituents.

And yet *Watergate* was self-evidently the source for the formula $\{x+gate\}$ and novel applications of the formula. What this means is that “Watergate” – the name for a whole complex of agents and events – allowed speakers to imagine a new structure $\{x+gate\}$ whose semantics give overall semantics analogous to the meaning of *Watergate* (secret event and subsequent scandal, specific place or agents, etc.) but in which the event complex is broken into two constituents; one of them, $\{x\}$, refers to the focus of events, and the other part, $\{gate\}$, establishes the existence of a secret event and its attendant scandal involving the focus $\{x\}$, whereas in the source *Watergate*, the whole included all the components.

Two aspects of this change are significant. First, the new structure is motivated by the inherited word, but it is not a copy; it cannot be generated by a proportional analogy. Instead, what the example shows is that speech has the potential of providing motivation for creating new speech directly. To say it another way, speech is not just speech; speech invites modal possibilities. The second point is that the source here really is speech that actually occurred in real time: *Watergate* started as a single event complex that occurred at some time in history; it did not start as a pattern. That is, a singular event and the accompanying speech give rise to an innovation; speech creates speech. This new $\{x+gate\}$ is a virtual structure which might exist indefinitely. We cannot verify its existence until it is acted on. Therein is a property of language that has eluded description: the fact that speech happens, that activity matters, it happens when a novel formation is used, and it happens to the extent that neologisms are created and used in speech.

This example, then, suggests a more active role for *parole* (performance, speech) than has usually been assumed. In this instance actual speech from a very specific historical time (1972) provided the model and created the potential for new speech, and that is what resulted. It is worth stating that speech is not just blind activity; speech comes with implicit patterns, whether firmly established or – as in this case – potential, possible, modal speech.

It could be mentioned that this formation, along with similar neologisms motivated by *alcoholic*, have distinctive stylistic overtones and spheres of usage – in the personal sphere, gentle mockery (*shopaholic*, *chocoholic*) and not-so-gentle journalistic irony for the former (*Camillagate*). The News History Gallery at the Newseum³ in Washington, D.C., devoted to the history of journalism, has an exhibit called “The ‘Gate’ Syndrome,” illustrated by five examples, starting with *Koreagate* (1976).⁴

4 “(N)apron” as dynamic doublet

A somewhat similar change is the change from *napron* to *apron* in Middle English. As is familiar, a dozen or so nouns which had once begun with an initial consonant *n* lost the *n* and came to begin with the vowel of the first syllable. According to the standard analysis, this happened because when such nouns were used with the indefinite article *a(n)*, a sequence of [anV] would result, and then it is unclear whether the intervocalic [n] belongs to the stem of the noun or to the article. The ambiguity opened up the possibility that the [n] could be attributed to the article and the noun could be reanalyzed as beginning with a vowel. Subsequently the stem shape without the vowel could be extended to all contexts; thus {a+napron} > [anapron] was analyzed as {an+apron} > [anapron], leading to the use of {apron} elsewhere. As is well known, the converse also occurs, where nouns beginning with an initial vowel (*an ewt*) acquired an initial *n* from the indefinite article (> *a newt*). It is not clear why the change of metanalysis should be able to go in either direction.

This standard analysis discusses only the end-points of this change – prior to metanalysis, after metanalysis – but does not describe how the change progressed. To get a sense of how this change actually proceeded, I attempted to trace the history of spellings *(n)apron* in Middle English with an eye to variation in the choice of the word form in different contexts. The task was rather more challenging than I had expected. The word *(n)apron* is quite specific. It occurs infrequently, primarily in wills and inventories of good to be bequeathed. (And also, as will be noted below, in a description of the rules of the household of Edward IV.) The item is mentioned only in a minority of the wills or inventories available, and usually when the deceased is a woman. For example, the extensive *Wills and Inventories of Bury St. Edmunds* has approximately 150 printed pages of wills from the beginning of the fifteenth century (one will from 1370, then 1418, etc.)

³ <http://www.newseum.org/>

⁴ Arnold Zwicky calls {gate} a “libfix” – “lib” in the sense of “liberated” – which captures the idea that a mental operation extracts a new affix (<https://arnoldzwicky.org/2010/01/23/libfixes/>). The author wishes to thank the editors for this and many other valuable and droll comments and corrections.

to the late sixteenth century (1570), and has no instances of the word in either variant, *napron* or *apron*. That, despite instances such as the will of one Agas Herte (a. 1522, pp. 114–18), who bequeathed about 50 distinct household objects to her son, including “*ij tabyll clothes, vj napkyns, iiij pleyne and to of diap, a salte saler of pewter...*” and about the same number to her daughter, including “*ij tabell clothes, vi napkyns, iiij pleyne and ij of diap, and a pleyne towel...*” Among all the items she bequeathed, including the items made of cloth just mentioned, no (*n*)*apron* was mentioned. This might be because this household, and other households as well, did not use (*n*)*aprons*; it might be they were considered too insignificant to be mentioned in bequests (though towels and napkins and sheets are recorded regularly). In any event, the frequency with which (*n*)*apron* appears is modest. In short, it has proven difficult to find document sets in which (*n*)*apron* is mentioned multiple times; examples are isolated. To maximize the range of texts examined, I used Hathitrust/Google scans subjected to OCR. I searched for both *napron* and *apron*, both singular and plural, in variant spellings.

We can first take a quick look at chronology, using a ledger (*Fabric rolls*) kept by the York Minster which recorded miscellaneous expenses annually. The entries are written in Latin, though names for some items specific to the contemporary realia appear in English. Half a dozen times the rolls record payment for the costs of masonry, both for wages and equipment – aprons and gloves for masons (called “setters”). The earliest record from 1371 surprisingly has *n*-less *aprons* (*ij aprons et cirotecis* ‘two aprons and gloves’, 1371). Then at the beginning of the fifteenth century come two instances of *naprons*: *In remuneracione data cementariis vocatis setters ad parietes cum naprons et cirotecis, per annum 9s. 10d.* ‘as compensation given to the masons known as setters at the wall with aprons and gloves, annually 9s. 10d.’ (1404); *In ij pellibus emptis et datis eisdem pro naporons*, ‘two hides were bought and given to them to serve as aprons’ (1423). At the end of the fifteenth century there are two examples of Latin *limas* (*duobus limatibus*, 1497–98; *Pro ij limatibus*, 1499), and shortly thereafter, *aprons* (*pro ij le aprons de correo pro les setters per spacium ij mensium, 12d.* ‘for two aprons of hide for the setters for the period of two months, 12 shillings’ (1504). The use of *aprons* in 1371 seems anomalously early (could it be an error in transcribing the text?). This anomaly aside, the examples suggest a chronology: *napron* was used in the fifteenth century (1404, 1423) and shifted to *apron* the beginning of the fifteenth century (1504). Other texts suggest there was still some variation in the sixteenth century. By 1600 *apron* had taken over.

Against the background of generally skimpy attestation of (*n*)*apron* in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, there are two texts which offer enough examples to allow us to say something about usage. One is a single text, the so-called *Liber Niger Domus Regis*, which specifies the duties and compensation of the staff of King Edward IV’s household in the last quarter of the fifteenth century (c. 1480). A modern edition compiles three manuscripts (discussion, Myers 1959: 51–60). The oldest is a manuscript from the end of the fifteenth century, which served as the basis for the famous 1790 publication by the Society of Antiquaries (abbreviated “A”); however, text A is now defective, and it also appears that the 1790 edition took some liberties, so the printed 1790 edition cannot be trusted to represent the oldest text A. In the accompanying Table 3 I’ve cited the

location of readings from the 1790 reading edition in ||. The next oldest is a sixteenth-century manuscript (preserved in the Public Records Office, the Exchequer, abbreviated E), from the era of Henry VIII, is similar to A but fuller. Third, the youngest of the three manuscripts, known as Harleian 642 (here H), is a seventeenth-century copy made by Sir Simonds d'Ewers. In fact, differences recorded in footnotes by Myers in his edition are minimal and affect the analysis here in only one respect, mentioned below.

There are basically two contexts (with one additional outlier). Examples repeat over the descriptions of many different servants. The twelve examples of *(n)apron* are given in abbreviated form Table 3.

Table 3: *(n)apron* in Liber Niger of Edward IV

| | type | text [variants] |
|-----------------|------|---|
| §55 [49.7d] | MOD | they have part of the ^α yeftes ^α geuwn to the household... but none aprons [1790: ^α gyftes ^α] |
| §62 [52.28d] | DO | [takith] at euery of the iiij festes of the yere, naprons of the great spycery |
| §62 [52.28d] | DO | take naprons also at euerych of the iiij festes |
| §80 [71.6] | DO | etithe in the halle; taking for wages... and nyzt lyuereye, napors , and parte of the generall giftes |
| §80 | DO | taking for his wynter clothing chaunces, napors , parte of the giftes generall [extended passage, absent in 1790] |
| §74 [61.26d] | 1DO | Eche of them takethe... j napron of lynyn cloth of ij ellez [1790: a naperon] |
| §77 [65.19d] | 1DO | At euery of the iiij festes, j napron of j elle, price vjd. [1790: one napron of one elle] |
| §33 [36.10u] | PRP | [he takith]... ij elles of lynen clothe for aprons , price the elle, xijd. |
| §77 [64.25d] | PRP | ij ellez of lynyn cloth... for naprons |
| §77 [65.8d] | PRP | j elle of lynnyn clothe for naprons |
| §77 [64.41] | PRP | j elle for naprons of lynyn cloth |
| §80 [71.26d] | PRP | ^α and for chaunces iiijjs. viijd. ^α of napors at euerye [H ^{αα} ; H aprons] |

§ = section in Myers, || page in 1790 edition

In one isolated instance, the noun is preceded by *none*; the nasal might have elicited the following *apron*. The other eleven tokens are split between two contexts. In six instances the noun is the direct object of the verb 'take' (listed as "do"). The entities taken have already been formed into garments; all have *napron*. Within this group of six examples, in two of these six, marked here as "1DO," the word *napron* is preceded in texts E and H by *j*, that is, Roman numeral 'one'. (The published 1790 version has the indefinite article *a napron* in one instance and the written word *one napron* in the other, rather than the numeral.) Both E and H use numerals consistently in discussions of compensation; prices of elles of linen cloth are cited with numerals, such as *j elle*. The numeral here must be original, thus *j napron* in both examples. I will return to these in a moment.

The second group of six examples involves the statement that servants receive compensation in the form of linen cloth which is supposed to be turned into (n)*aprons*, expressed by a preposition, usually *for*, once *of*. In this context the entity referred to as (n)*apron* does not yet exist; the noun has a future attributive sense: "the speaker wishes to assert something about whatever or whoever fits that description" of being (or becoming) an apron (Donnellan 1966: 285). An example is: *at eueryche of the iiij festes of the yere, of the clerk of greete spycery, ij elles of lynen clothe for aprons, price the elle, xij^d*. This one sentence has *aprons*, which seems to suggest that an attributive reading implies *aprons*. But this sentence is the only instance with *aprons* among the five tokens of this attributive context, so an attributive reading by itself can't explain *aprons* in this specific example. I return to this token below.

Let us turn to the second text, namely *Durham wills and inventories*. The second text is not, strictly speaking, a single text but a series of wills; still, they are all from one locale and one tradition over a short interval, from 1562 to 1570, and can be treated as a single text. (In fact, there is a string of four tokens of (n)*apron* in a row.) The tokens are given in Table 4.

Only two contexts occur in this small corpus. One context is represented by two tokens, in which the indefinite article and noun are separated by a modifier (*a linn Apron*, *a blewe apron*). The modifier makes these constructions novel. This pair of examples suggests two thoughts: that the innovative form *apron* is favored to the extent the context in which the noun is used is non-idiomatic, novel; and the concept of idiomaticity is a gradated (not discretely binary) parameter. To continue down this path, both in the example from 1562 and the 1570 example (from volume III of these documents), *an apron* occurs in the middle of a miniature list of three bequeathed items. Lists by their nature hint that a set of entities could be extended, so they promise a modal, possible, open-endedness. Thus it appears that open-endedness favors the innovative form *an apron*. In contrast, in the will of cook William Hawkesley (presented in Table 4 as a block of four tokens), the second through fourth tokens have a fixed phrase *a napron*, and the whole construction, 'I give to *x a napron*', is a standard idiom of bequests. Thus fixed idioms use the inherited older form *a napron*. In 1569 Alice Barnes receives two worsted items; possibly the parallel in material is the critical information, and the fact that one is a (n)*apron* is incidental.

Table 4: (n)apron in Durham Wills and Inventories

| type | text |
|------|---|
| MOD | It' I bequith to Agnes Carter a linn Apron . (I.277, 1567) |
| MOD | It'm I gyve to Helenor Huntley iiij ^{or} blake patletts iiij ^{or} cherches a blewe apron & ij ^o velvett pattletts (I.343, 1570) |
| ART | to Thomas Burdon a bussell of wheat – to Jane Brantinga' a line kyrcheff an apron & a pair of hoose (I.198–99, 1562) |
| ART | I geve unto Elizabeth Hackforth a kerchif, a rail, a smock, an apron and all my workday rayment and in mony 3s. 4d. (III.56–57, 1570) |
| ART | It'm I gyve to katheryn barnes ij ^s vj ^d . It'm I gyve to thomeis hynde y ^t was my p'ntice an apron & a new |
| ART | fyshe knyffe. It'm I gyve to thomas capstone a |
| ART | napron . It'm I gyve to thomas boswell a napron . |
| ART | It'm I gyve to luke hanynge a napron & a fyshe borde. (I.327, 1570) |
| ART | And to alles Barnes a gowne of worsted & a napron of worsted (I.305, 1569) |

The most interesting example is the first example of the 1570 set. Throughout this will of William Hawkesley, the recipients are identified in an unambiguous but not expansive fashion; the recipients are listed by name alone (22 xx) or with name and geographical location (3 xx) or name and relationship (9 xx), such as mother-in-law or midwife. That is, the recipients are presumed to be known by name with the briefest of descriptions, almost titles. Against that background, the description of the first recipient of aprons, *thomeis hynde y^t was my p'ntice*, stands out; given its relative clause *y^t* ('that'), the identification of Thomas is relatively elaborate. Indirectly, this means that the bequest – an apron and a fish knife – is out of the ordinary, atypical. In contrast, in the three bequests that follow immediately thereafter are idiomatic. It appears, then, that novel or unexpected bequests of aprons – the bequest itself or the recipient – are expressed by the innovative (*an*) *apron*, while less novel scenarios are expressed by the older form *a napron*.

This takes us back to the one example in the Liber Niger Domus Regis Edward IV which had *aprons* (other than *none aprons*): [*he taketh*] *at eueryche of the iiij festes of the yere, of the clerk of greete spycery, ij elles of lynen clothe for aprons, price the elle, xij^d*. In and of itself, the sentence is unremarkable and indistinguishable from the other examples with prepositions which had *naprons*. What might be atypical is the office described here, which is that of *sewar*, the highest ranking and first mentioned of the king's servants: A

SEWAR FOR THE KYNG, wich owith to be full cunyng, diligent, and attendaunt. He receueth the metes by sayez and saufly so conueyeth hit to the kinges bourde with saucez according therto, and all that commith to that bourde he settith and dyrectith (§33, p. 112). In this instance, although the act of taking aprons is not exceptional, the recipient – the *sewar* – is unique. This is then similar to *thomeis hynde y^t was my p^tntice* from *Durham wills and inventories*, in the sense that the non-idiomatic character of the example derives from the recipient, not the (n)*apron* phrase. That should not be surprising, since the act of bequeathing includes a recipient as well as the item bequeathed. The innovative *aprons* here acts effectively as an honorific to draw attention to the unusual status of the recipient, as it did with *thomeis hynde y^t was my p^tntice*.

In general, it appears the innovative form is favored if the transfer of *apron* is novel, not typical, and this extends to the recipient of the transfer (relative to other recipients). This principle applies to both example sets from different stages of the change. This distribution – unidiomatic context prefers the novel form – turns out to match other instances of the competition between equivalent morphological forms. Thus in contemporary Czech the locative singular (used with certain prepositions) can be either the traditional ending {-e} or a new ending {-u}. (That ending is original with nouns of the Indo-European *u*-stem declension, but its use with *o*-stem masculine nouns is new.) The parallel is that the traditional {-e} is used with “typical” combinations while innovative {-u} is used with atypical contexts (Bermel 1993).

There is another regularity of some interest that applies to both texts. We saw above that in *Liber Niger* there were two instances in which (n)*apron* followed the numeral *j* (‘one’), and in both the older form *napron* was used. The examples are more or less equivalent in meaning to a true indefinite article as in *a napron*; the two examples of *j napron* (with *napron*) with the numeral invite the suspicion that true indefinite articles at this time might have *napron*, if they were attested. Conveniently, there is a contemporaneous will that has two tokens of an indefinite article one after the other: *Also I gyve to Margarete Holton my best kyrtyll & a napron*. *Also I gyve to Elisabeth Wike a smok & a napron* (will of Jone Montor, 1489, *Surrey Wills*, p. 95). A slightly later example is consistent: *A jak & a salet, a gorget, ij gussettes, a napron, and iij gauntletttes* (*York wills*, p. 35, 1512). These examples at least suggest that the context with an indefinite article used the more conservative form.

To return to the other text under discussion here, *Durham wills and inventories*, there were two recognizable contexts. One involves an indefinite article split from the noun; it does show that the change had progressed to novel (unidiomatic) contexts. The other context had seven tokens with an indefinite article (not separated from the noun); the older form *napron* was used 4 times, the novel form time 3 times. That is to say, the novel form *apron* was slow to appear in the context in which the indefinite article immediately preceded the noun. For both periods (late 1400s, third quarter of 1500s) it appears that a construction with an indefinite article uses *apron* less (or at least not more) than other contexts.

Now the standard analysis is that the ambiguous combination of indefinite article and *napron* led to a reanalysis of {a+napron} to {an+apron}. If so, it would be natural to expect that *apron* would be used first in the context of reanalysis and only later in other contexts

– that is, it should appear earliest with the indefinite article. But we just saw that in both texts, *apron* was used in other contexts when *an apron* was not yet used (the first text plus the auxiliary wills) or not used as frequently (the second text).

This suggests a revision of the account of reanalysis. Since the appearance of *apron* is in fact not tied to the indefinite article, the unit *apron* appears to have some degree of autonomy. The reanalysis consists not of replacing the underlying shape of the noun, but it consists of imagining the possibility of an alternate word form {apron}, which co-exists, for a time, with an alternate sublexeme {napron}. Imagined {apron} becomes real only when it is actually used. Following the general principle that innovative forms appear first in novel contexts, {napron} was maintained with the indefinite article – in fact, the most conventional and idiomatized construction – while the sublexeme {apron} was used in novel contexts cited above, such as [takith]... *ij elles of lynen clothe for aprons* and ... *to thomeis hynde y^t was my pⁿtice an apron*. Over time, {apron} and {napron} compete; {apron} keeps on increasing, in a fashion that could be understood as the other half of Newton's first law: once in motion, a body, or linguistic subsystem, will remain in motion.

Semantically the new demilexeme {apron} must be basically similar to traditional {napron}. For example, both demilexemes refer to protective coverings, usually of cloth, though in artisanry, aprons could be sheepskins. In the York fabric rolls – the record of expenses of the York expenses, including irregular expenses of masons and their equipment – we observe naprons used at the beginning of the fifteenth century – *In ij pellibus emptis et datis eisdem pro naporons* ‘two hides were bought and given to them to serve as aprons’ (1423) – and then the form is *aprons* at the end of the fifteenth century]: *pro ij le aprons de correo pro les setters per spacium ij mensium*, 12d. ‘for two aprons of hide for the setters for the period of two months, 12 shillings’ (1504). That is only to say that *napron* and *apron* seem to have the same extension.

Still, despite the overlap in extension, there are indications that the two sublexemes began to develop slightly different connotations.⁵ Two facts argue for this.

The first, perhaps unexpectedly, has to do with translations of the Bible. As is well-known, John Wycliffe translated much of the Bible from the Vulgate, around 1382. (His translation was finished by his followers after his death.) A passage of interest is Genesis 3:7 – the famous story of the nakedness of Adam and Eve – for which Wycliffe (or his followers) translated Vulgate ...*cognovissent esse se nudos consuerunt folia ficus et fecerunt sibi perizomata* as ...*and when they knew that they were naked, they sewed the leaves of a fig tree, and made breeches to themselves*.

Wycliffe's Bible became the model for an extended tradition of English translations thereafter, but with a difference in this passage. Starting with Tynsdale (1534), the subsequent translations have a different noun in Genesis 3:7: ...*vnderstode how that they were naked. Than they sowed fygge leves togedder and made them apurns*. The translation with *aprons* continues through Cloverdale (1535), the Great Bible (1540), Matthew's Bible (1549), the Catholic Bishops' Bible (1568), the Geneva Bible (1587), and finally the King James (1604–1611). All have *aprons* (variant spellings) except for the Geneva Bible, a retrograde Protestant Bible which returned to Wycliffe's *breeches*.

⁵ In a fashion consistent with Bréal's (1900: ch. 2) “law of differentiation” of synonyms.

The improvised fig-leaf garment of Genesis 3:7 wasn't exactly an apron in the sense of linen or hide aprons, but it was somewhat similar. Why was *apron* used instead of *napron*? One reason might be that *apron* was the innovative form, and innovative forms are more appropriate than conventional forms for encoding semantic extensions. There is another possibility. As we saw in the Liber Niger, *naprons* were something that would result from linen, and their value was defined by the price of the linen used to make them. In earlier wills *naprons* were classified with other items of cloth with different functions; *naprons* belonged to the *naperie* (the collection of similar cloths) along with *napkins* (same sense as modern) and *borde clothes* or *table cloths*. So the sublexeme {napron} emphasized the origin of the entity in cloth or hide; secondarily, such a flat piece of material could be donned for protection. With the sublexeme {apron} the dominant feature is not that it was made from material (or hide); the dominant feature is that it is a garment worn to provide protective covering. This difference in the ranking of features – MATERIAL as opposed FUNCTION – might be why the corrections to Wycliff's Bible used *apron*.

A second indication is the way items are grouped in *Chesterfield wills and inventories of household goods*. For example, from Derbyshire #177 (Margaret Capper, 1588) here is a partial list of items (omitting tools and animals). Items are listed in the inventory in natural classes. Categories are added here:

<furniture> / 4 bedstids in the Chamber / 2 bedstids in the parlar with pented Cloates about them / 1 bed teaster of Cloathe / 3 bed stids in the nether Chamber / <bedding> / 8 pillobears / 8 hand towels / 4 shietes / <garment> / 1 smock / 2 *aperns* / 1 bruse and a grater / 1 Coat and a pear of house / 1 Gone and a for kertle [?] / 1 buckrame savgard / <utensils> / 2 Chamber pots / 1 mortar and a Cresset / 3 Chaffindishes / 1 Skomar and a ladle of brase / 9 bear potes and 2 black potes / 1 falling bord in the house / 3 pans 2 ketles / 1 basson brase / 4 brase potes

Note that *aprons* is listed next to smock and other garments. (The listing of a "bruse and grater" below *aperns* seems out of place.) By this time, in the late sixteenth century, an {apron} was classified as a garment.

Does this explain why {apron} continued to displace {napron}? Possibly. The demilexeme {apron} removes aprons from the domain of the *naperie* (the collection of pieces of fabric) to the domain of garments. The extension may be the same, but the intension changes, by the re-ranking of the semantic features of the two demilexemes: {napron} ranks the material over the function, whereas {apron}, while it does not that fabric may be involved, ranks garment and its function of covering as more important.

There are several conclusions here. The two demilexemes have a certain autonomy: they have overlapping but not identical semantics; they have different preferred contexts in which they appear. From this it follows that the change of *napron* to *apron* is not a simple substitution of one form for the other. Next, the newer form *apron* seems not to appear in the context of an indefinite article ahead of other contexts, as might be expected if *apron* merely replaced *napron*. This again implies that *apron* and *napron* are somewhat separate entities. Third, the ambiguity of [anapron] made the change possible, but the change was the creation of two demilexemes here, {napron} and {apron}, not a reparsing.

5 Conclusion

The examples above suggest that *parole* exists, that it has a role in language. Saussure, as we saw, did his best to hide *parole* from view, but it ended up that *parole* has a life of its own: it required its own set of rules and it was maintained (the accent stayed on the same syllable as in Latin) without justification in the system.⁶ All the action of stress in Romance was in *parole*, not *système*. In other examples, we saw that *parole* is maintained from one generation to the next, not because it is motivated by higher principles, but because it was the usage and it was then transmitted as usage. *Parole* can also shape other changes (such as the apocope of post-tonic vowels in the transition from Latin to French and the restriction on intrusive /r/ to low vowels). Variants of lexemes, such as {napron} and {apron}, have partially separate existences and properties, including semantics.

Parole is not always static and it is not one-dimensional. *Parole* is, after all, activity, and human activity implies the possibility of more activity and other paths of activity, which may differ from inherited activity. *Parole* is habit infused with potential.

⁶ Boris Gasparov (2013) has argued that Saussure's thinking was more complex (and less rigidly categorial and structuralist) than the subsequent reception would have it (especially chapter 4, pp. 111–37).

Abbreviations and texts cited

| Abbreviation | Explication of abbreviation |
|---|---|
| 1790 | Society of Antiquaries of London, 1790. <i>V. Liber Niger Domus Regis Edward IV. From a MS. in the Harleian Library, № 642, fol. 1–196</i> , A collection of ordinances and regulations for the government of the royal household, made in divers reigns. From King Edward III. to King William and Queen Mary. Also receipts in ancient cookery. Printed for the Society of Antiquaries by John Nichols. |
| Chesterfield wills and inventories | Bestall, J. M.; Fowkes, D. V., ed., a glossary by Rosemary Milward with an introduction by David Hey & an index by Barbara Bestall. 1977. <i>Chesterfield wills and inventories 1521–1603</i> . Vol. 1 (Derbyshire Record Society). Derbyshire: Derbyshire Record Society. |
| Durham wills and inventories | <i>Wills and inventories illustrative of the history, manners, language, statistics, &c., of the northern counties of England, from the eleventh century downwards</i> . 1835. Vol. I (Publications of the Surtees Society, vol. 2). London: J. B. Nichols & Son; 1906. Vol. III (Publications of the Surtees Society, 112.). London: J. B. Nichols & Son. |
| Fabric rolls | <i>The fabric rolls of York Minster with an appendix of illustrative documents</i> . 1859. Vol. 35. (Publications of the Surtees Society). Durham: Published for the Society by G. Andrews. |
| Surrey wills | <i>Surrey wills</i> . (Archdeaconry Court, Spage Register). 1922. Vol. 5 (Surrey Record Society). Surrey: Roworth & Co., for the Surrey Record Society. |
| Wills and inventories of Bury St. Edmunds | <i>Wills and inventories from the registers of the commissary of Bury St. Edmunds and the archdeacon of Sudbury</i> . 1850. London: Printed for the Camden Society. |
| York wills | <i>Testamenta eboracensia, or Wills registered at York: illustrative of the history, manners, language, statistics, &c., of the province of York, from the year MCCC downwards</i> . London: J. B. Nichols & Son, 1836–1902. |

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