

The University of Georgia Department of Romance Languages,
Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, and Program in Linguistics

present a lecture by

Roger Wright

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Was Romance a New Language?

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275 Student Learning Center

With 6 single-authored books, three edited books, and 100 articles to his credit, Roger Wright is one of the foremost scholars of Spanish and Romance Linguistics in the world. His book *Late Latin and Early Romance (in Spain and Carolingian France)* (1982) offered a new conception of the relationship between Latin and the Romance languages.

Was Romance a new language? Was the Romance language spoken in the early medieval centuries a new system different from that of Latin? Or was it just an ever-developing collection of intrinsically unrelated features? It is customary to think of a language as being a “structure”, but the continuous phenomena of linguistic change make it hard to sustain this rigid metaphor in any detailed manner, and some less geometric metaphor is probably preferable (such as that of a minestrone soup). Language changes are composed of at least three separate parts: (a) innovation, for new innovations arise all the time; (b) diffusion, for sometimes the new features come to be widely diffused, leading to variation between old and new features; (c) resolution of the variation, for sometimes (not always) the old feature drops out; and only when all three stages have happened has there really been what we usually refer to as a change. Thus Romance is certainly a transitional stage between Latin and the separate Romance Languages, full of variable features both old (as Latin genitive morphology) and new (as the ever-widening use of *de* to mean "of"); but then all languages are always in a transitional stage, and like any other language Romance, being a developing collection of features, rather than a collection of new features, deserves to be studied in its own right.