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Professor Martin Maiden (Oxford, UK):
Folk etymology, contamination, and morphological change.
Examples from the Romance languages

**We are pleased to invite you to the lecture given by Professor Martin Maiden
on 12 December 2019, at Charles University in Prague,
Faculty of Arts, Department of Romance Studies, Room n. 116 at 14:30.**

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In this lecture, Professor Maiden will illustrate from various Romance languages two related types of morphological change, namely folk etymology and contamination. These phenomena involve associative influences between words which are not otherwise related. In the typical case, folk etymology confers the appearance of a compound word on an otherwise opaque and completely arbitrary sign (e.g., the English loanword *bowsprit*—a part of a sailing ship— is borrowed into French as *beaupré*, literally ‘beautiful meadow’). Contrary to what is sometimes claimed, such changes usually do not ‘motivate’ such words, but actually tend to make ‘nonsense’ of them. Contamination occurs between semantically related terms (e.g., Latin *CRASSUS* ‘fat’ influenced by *GROSSUS* ‘large’ > Italian *grasso*). A particular case of contamination of the verb ‘snow’ by the verb ‘rain’ in various Alpine Romance varieties will be considered, which has the remarkable characteristic that the locus of the contamination is not the lexical portion of these verbs, but their inflexion-class marking. The conclusion will be that both types of phenomena tend to illustrate the autonomy of morphological structure from the lexical or grammatical meanings apparently associated with them. Such data are complementary to other claims Maiden has made about the role of autonomous or ‘morphomic’ paradigmatic structures in diachrony.

Martin Maiden is Professor of the Romance Languages at the University of Oxford and Director of the Oxford Research Centre for Romance Linguistics. His main interests are in Italian and Romanian linguistics and dialectology. He has worked intensively on the evolution of morphological systems, in particular on the history of the Romance verb. This outstanding research is now presented in his recent book *The Romance Verb. Morphomic Structure and Diachrony* (OUP 2018). He is also co-editor of important collective works on the history and structure of the Romance languages, in particular *The Oxford Guide to the Romance Languages* (OUP 2016, co-edited with Adam Ledgeway) and he is a co-author of *The Oxford History of Romanian Morphology* (OUP 2020). Professor Maiden has also been a Fellow of the British Academy since 2003.



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