

Matthias Benjamin Passer

The Typology and Diachrony of Nominal Classification

There are two ways for a language to classify its nouns: either by means of classifiers, which specify the semantics of the classified noun, or by means of grammatical gender, which groups all nouns of a language into formal classes.

This thesis investigates the common assumption that classifier systems may develop into grammatical gender systems. Because this diachronic phenomenon has not yet been documented for any language, the likeliness that such a development would occur is examined by means of a typological study of synchronic systems.

In analyzing the data, this study adopts a new perspective on the development of nominal classification by separating how the means of formal expression develops from the development of those components that have to do with a system's semantic transparency.

This twofold account for the data from a variety sample of 40 languages shows that there is indeed a number of systems that lie at the intersection of classifiers and gender systems, but that a direct shift from classifier to gender is not likely to occur.

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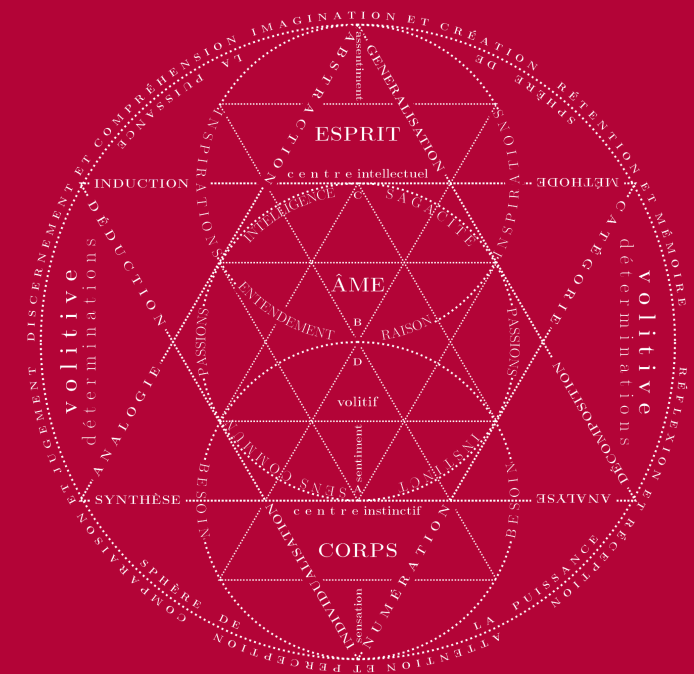
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