

# Author's Preface

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**Toward a Historiography of Linguistics: Selected Essays**

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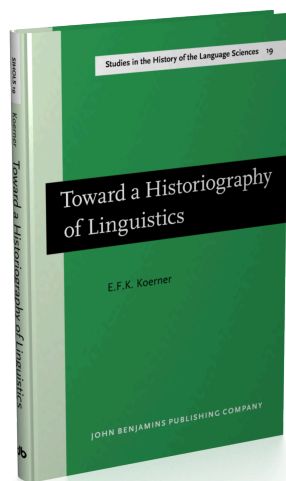
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## PREFACE

As late as Spring 1977, a contributor to the almost 40-year-old "Journal of the History of Ideas", addressing himself to methodological questions in intellectual history, made the following concluding statement:

On the whole, the methodology of the history of ideas is in its infancy. The fields is in this respect behind general history, of which it is a part. One may therefore suggest that the interest of historians of ideas should be more directed towards the methodological problems of their field than has hitherto been the case. The reason is that when the foundation of a house is shaky, it does not make much sense continuously to add new stories to it.<sup>1</sup>

It appears that the history of linguistics, though it has become only in recent years a widely accepted field of scholarly inquiry, has paid more attention to questions of theory and method.<sup>2</sup> There are few indications, however, that widely-accepted principles for linguistic historiography have been established; indeed a number of issues in the field are far from having been settled. In the later 1960s and early 1970s there was a wide-spread optimism that the history of science could offer something like a guide to historians of linguistics. T. S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) has been thought to represent something of a model that the historian of linguistic science might wish to imitate and to reformulate in accordance with the requirements of his particular domain. More recently, however, this idea has come under heavy, though not always constructive attack. Part of the criticism appears to rest upon a misinterpretation of Kuhn; other criticisms seem to stem from a misunderstanding of the goals and tasks of linguistic historiography.

Interestingly enough, those who have advocated a debunking of Kuhn's ideas about scientific revolutions and the establishment or existence of disciplinary matrixes or 'paradigms' have not come forth with a possible alternative framework; they appear to have been satisfied with a demonstration that those

1) Nils B. Kvastad, "Semantics in the Methodology of the History of Ideas", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38:1.157-74 (1977), on p.174.

2) Cf. the fine exposition of these issues by Raffaele Simone, "Théorie et histoire de la linguistique", *Historiographia Linguistica* 2:3.353-78 (1975).

who believe that Kuhn's proposals could be made use of, in a judicious way, by the historian of linguistics are misinformed and misleading. Unfortunately, this whole-sale rejection of Kuhnian ideas advocated in the recent literature appears to have led many to abandon the discussion of methodological and epistemological questions in linguistic historiography, if the small number of papers offered for presentation at the plenary session "History of Linguistics: Theory and Method" at the forthcoming International Conference on the History of the Language Sciences (Ottawa, 28-31 August 1978) may be taken as an indication of such a trend.

If this diagnosis is adequate, some of my papers devoted to theoretical, epistemological or methodological issues in linguistic historiography included in the present volume may serve as an antidote. Although I never regarded the uncritical application of principles proposed by historians of science, whether by Kuhn, Popper, or another scholar, as a remedy for the traditional malaise in linguistic history-writing, I have always been of the opinion that the history of linguistics is served better if at least a preliminary frame of reference is at hand which could guide the researcher in the field. The discussion rather than the unreflected adoption of suggestions made by historians of science has always been my intention, as should be obvious from items 2 (1972/76) and 3 (1973) in the present collection of papers.

Recent criticism of Kuhn's principles by scholars working in the history of linguistics and their advice to dismiss them altogether from consideration have not failed to influence my own outlook on the matter, at least in two respects: First, I have directed much of my attention to empirical research devoted to the work of a distinguished scholar in the discipline or to particular concepts that made history, trying not only to correct traditional misconceptions (often due to uncritical reliance on verdicts passed by earlier historians of linguistics) but also attempting to advance historiographic methodology by exemplary investigation and presentation of facts. The other effect of the rejection of Kuhnian ideas by historians of linguistics has been that I have proposed, in a paper presented at a meeting of linguists held at M. I. T. in November 1976, models for the analysis of particular stages of development in linguistics, e.g., the Progress-by-Accumulation Model, the Pendulum-Swing (between data orientation and theory orientation) Model, the Mainstream versus Undercurrent Model, the Continuity vs. Discontinuity Model, etc.<sup>3</sup> In other

3) "On the Non-Applicability of Kuhn's Paradigms to the History of Linguistics", *Proceedings of the Seventh Meeting of the North Eastern Linguistic Society* ed. by J. A. Kegl, D. Nash, and A. Zaenen, 165-74. Cambridge, Mass.: Dept. of Linguistics and Philosophy, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1977.

words, I have tried to propose concepts that could help in the description of particular events or states of affairs in linguistic science, concepts which do not lean on those advocated by historians of science and which attempt to explain intra-disciplinary developments. In addition, quite in accord with views advanced in studies from 1970 onwards, I have tried to indicate how extra-linguistic factors which have influenced the development of linguistics can be accounted for. I hope to treat these issues more fully in papers that I am currently preparing for publication.

The papers brought together in the present volume represent, in my estimation, the essence of my reflections on issues concerning linguistic historiography and of particular investigations in 19th and 20th century linguistic thought worked out between 1969 and 1976. Some of them were embodied in or extracted and revised from larger works undertaken between 1969 and 1972, namely, my Simon Fraser University dissertation of 1971<sup>4</sup> and my contribution to volume 13 of *Current Trends in Linguistics*.<sup>5</sup> Others were written independently or for particular occasions, such as the foundation of a specialist journal or the organization of a scholarly meeting. I shall refrain from commenting on individual articles in this preface, but restrict myself to two or three general remarks that seem to bear on matters of scholarship concerning the history of linguistics.

To begin with, it appears to happen only too frequently that the interpretation of a particular theory is not judged according to principles of adequacy or jejuneness, but according to personal tastes, not to say prejudices. How else could it be explained that some scholars have regarded the argument in my paper on Hermann Paul (item 5) as unconvincing and in fact misleading whereas others have considered it as a most original contribution. Indeed it seems that opinion is taken as more important than a thorough, albeit somewhat polemical, documentation of facts; how else could it be explained that a scholar, who had been criticized for having argued that the Humboldtian linguist Georg von der Gabelentz was a forerunner of Ferdinand de Saussure (cf. item 8), now dismisses the entire argument by simply suggesting that Saussure's assimilation of the Humboldtian tradition does not diminish Saussure's genius, as if this had been the real issue. Indeed, as long as the history of linguistics is taken

4) Printed in somewhat revised form in 1973 under the title *Ferdinand de Saussure: Origin and development of his linguistic thought in Western studies of language: A contribution to the history and theory of linguistics* (Braunschweig: F. Vieweg & Sohn, 2nd printing, 1974), XL, 428 pp.

5) "European Structuralism: Early beginnings", *Current Trends in Linguistics* ed. by Thomas A. Sebeok, vol. 13: *Historiography of Linguistics*, 717-827. The Hague: Mouton, 1975. (The manuscript was completed in June 1972.)

as a happy hunting ground for ancestors, geniuses, and the like, and the forum for the advancement of personal tastes and preconceived opinion, scholars seriously engaged in historiographic work will have to face the criticism, perhaps ridicule, of linguists who discard the history of linguistics as a worth-while field of scholarly research.

Perhaps one more paper requires a brief comment as it seems to involve a principal aspect of the theory of linguistic historiography. It concerns the relationship between the argument brought forward in favour of attributing to the framework of linguistic analysis advanced by Schleicher the function of what Kuhn has called a 'paradigm' or 'disciplinary matrix' (cf. item 2 in the present volume) and the observation that the year 1876, which appears to be largely associated with the emergence of the neogrammarian 'school', constitutes a date which marks something like a turning point in linguistics (item 11). In my opinion these arguments are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary: It was Schleicher who, with his systematic use of concepts such as analogy, phonetic laws, the so-called starred forms, and with the introduction of concepts such as morphology, the family tree, etc., created the framework within which the particularly conspicuous advance in 1876 was made possible.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the *junggrammatische Richtung*, despite the tremendous increase in the general activity and sophistication in linguistic science, did not constitute a break with previous over-all principles, a revolution in the Kuhnian sense of the term, but an extension, a working-out of those methods which are generally associated with Schleicher and other scholars, for instance Curtius, of the earlier generation of linguists. The rejection of the latent biologism in Schleicher's theory of language, which was the result of the climate of opinion in his days, during the 1880s and 1890s, and its replacement by ideas derived from sociology and psychology, marks a change of ideology which, it would seem, had little bearing on linguistic practice among Brugmann and his colleagues as well as his other contemporaries who were critical of certain claims of the 'Leipzig school' at the time.

Both requests for offprint and ensuing correspondence with scholars all over the world who have taken an interest in the history of linguistics, and the fact that several papers were originally published in hard-to-come-by

6) After publication of the above-mentioned article I have been able to discover at least one article by Charles Léopold Rosapelly which substantiates Abbé Rousselot's report (cf. this volume p.199) and Zwirner's claim (*ibid.*, note 11), namely, "Essai d'inscription des mouvements phonétiques", in the series *Physiologie expérimentale: Travaux du Laboratoire de M. [Etienne Jules] Marey* 2.109-31 (Paris: G. Masson, 1876). - Another interesting article of 1876 is Heinrich Zimmer's (1851-1910) "Ostgermanisch und Westgermanisch" in *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 19.393-462.

places (e.g., items 6, 9,<sup>7</sup> and 10) have persuaded me to believe that their collection in one volume might not be unwelcome. With the exception of item 3, which constitutes a revised and condensed version of my editorial to the first issue of *Historiographia Linguistica* the original pagination, though moved toward the inside margin, has been retained so that reference to the original publications is possible. For the same reason the original sources of the articles are given below (in order of their present arrangement, not according to the chronology of their former publication):

- 1) *Language* 48:2.428-45 (June 1972) - actually a review article on Hans Arens' *Sprachwissenschaft*, 2nd rev. and enl. ed. (Freiburg & München, 1969).
- 2) *History of Linguistic Thought and Contemporary Linguistics* ed. by Herman Parret, 685-718. Berlin & New York: W. de Gruyter, 1976. (A preliminary version appeared under the same title in *Anthropological Linguistics* 14:7.255-80 [October 1972].)
- 3) *Historiographia Linguistica* 1:1.1-10 (1973), originally entitled "Purpose and Scope of *Historiographia Linguistica*: Editorial"; here actually pp. 1-7 plus a revised and updated bibliography.
- 4) *Foundations of Language* 14:4.541-47 (1976[1977]).
- 5) *Lingua* 29:3.274-307 (August 1972).
- 6) *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes* 14:4.663-82 (December 1972).
- 7) *Phonetica* 33:3.222-31 (1976).
- 8) *Studi saussuriani per Robert Godel* ed. by René Amacker, Tullio De Mauro, and Luis J. Prieto, 165-80. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1974.
- 9) *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien / German Yearbook of American Studies* 15.162-83 (May 1970).
- 10) *Sprache in Gegenwart und Geschichte: Festschrift für Heinrich Matthias Heinrichs* ed. by D. Hartmann, H. Linke, and O. Ludwig, 82-93. Wien & Köln: Böhlau, 1978. (The article was submitted in Fall 1975.)
- 11) *The Journal of Indo-European Studies* 4:4.333-53 (1976[1977]).
- 12) (Kuhn's) *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 89:2.185-90 (1975[1976]).

For technical reasons it has not been possible to avoid a repetition here and there, especially with regard to issues of theory and method of linguistic historiography which run through these papers like a red thread. Misprints and several errors of fact in the original articles have been corrected on a number of occasions, though the thrust of the argument and, at times, the polemical tone

7) This article in particular, written in Spring 1969, has been largely ignored in the literature, a noteworthy exception being Dell Hymes and John Fought in their informative and thorough study, "American Structuralism", *Current Trends in Linguistics* 13:2.903-1176 (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), esp. pp. 951-52, 957 note, 988 note, 1003, 1031, 1041, 1062-63, 1067, which might be consulted for the rectification of certain errors of fact and the judicious evaluation they contain.

in which it has been couched, has not been altered. I believe that I would now take a somewhat different, or at least a less forceful approach to the history of linguistics, but I still feel today that, though salt may be a most desirable ingredient in almost every scholarly or other human undertaking, pepper should not be entirely dispensed with.

Bickenbach über Engelskirchen, May 1978

E. F. K. K.