

# Language and Linguistics

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## HISTORY OF LINGUISTICS

70-1 **Vacheck, Josef.** A note on future prospects of diachronistic language research. *Lingua* (Amsterdam), 21 (1968), 483-93.

In considering the problem of the relation of language synchrony and diachrony Jakobson pointed out that every change in language should be considered in terms of the language system affected by it, and stressed that a change is often motivated by a need to restore the balance of the system. This idea was adopted by the Prague school. Halle described, in generativist terms, the machinery of phonological change, but did not express the motivation of the phonological changes in language. He did, however, stress the importance of the principle of discontinuity between the generations speaking the language. Wagner showed that supposed analogical change is often due to the elimination of a generative rule whose preservation would be uneconomical. The assumption of discontinuity is acceptable to both Wagner and the Prague group, as is also the assumption that language acquisition by a child consists in the construction of the simplest grammar capable of generating a certain set of utterances.

A synthesis of the functionalist and structuralist approach with the generativist and transformationalist approach might be achieved, if the non-static character of synchrony and the presence of weak systemic spots and tendencies aimed at eliminating them are recognized. A theory of *la parole* is needed, and is perhaps attempted by generative, transformational grammar, while the functionalist and structuralist conception is equivalent to a theory of *la langue*. Chomsky's 'competence' and 'performance' both refer to facts of *la parole*.

If the suggested synthesis materializes, functionalism and structuralism could concern themselves with the diagnostics of the language system, while the therapeutics would be handled by the generativist and transformationalist approach.

GENERAL LINGUISTIC THEORY

70-2 Oller, John W. B., Dennis Sales and Ronald V. Harrington. A basic circularity in traditional and current linguistic theory. *Lingua* (Amsterdam), 22, 4 (1969), 317-28.

In order to describe a language as a system and explain how speakers use it, it is necessary to study the relationship between language units and the things people communicate about. Some of Bloomfield's assumptions are very restrictive and his definition of the meaning of a linguistic form is misleading and inadequate. The meaning of a linguistic unit in any communicative situation is dependent on at least one person's experience with that unit and on the processes which enable that person to relate the information from his experience to the situation in question. Bloomfield appears to overlook the fact that the communicative use of linguistic units is systematic. A linguistic analysis reveals nothing about how people communicate unless it gives insight into the way speakers codify information.

Harris tried to avoid discussion of meaning. He assumed that it would be possible to identify linguistic units on the basis of formal, distributional criteria. He also stated that linguistic units must be defined relatively to the other elements and to the interrelations among all of them. An unidentified element cannot, however, be identified by reference to other unidentified elements.

Harris's view that language should be studied apart from meaning is reflected in current transformational, generative grammar. Chomsky partly avoids the problem by means of the idea of 'the linguistic intuition of the native speaker'. He implies that linguistic units have some interrelational structure apart from their use in communication. Chomsky, Katz and Fodor have suggested that speakers can produce and understand sentences that are wholly novel to them, but this is questioned. Katz and Fodor also adhere to the notion that the units of a language have meaning apart from their use in communication, stating that no sentence can have readings in a setting which it does not have in isolation. They are postulating a self-contained *semantic* structure apart from perceptual realities. What is required is study

and analysis of the relationships between linguistic units and the perceptual and conceptual entities of the cognitive experience which people talk about.

## SEMANTICS

**70-3 Kuznetsova, E. V.** О критериях выделения основного значения слова. [Criteria for determining the basic meaning of a word.] *Русский язык за рубежом* (Moscow), 1 (1969), 80-84.

In establishing basic meanings of words, three sets of criteria are used: structural, statistical and experimental. Structural characteristics of a word may be syntagmatic or paradigmatic. Consideration of syntagmatic characteristics shows that the basic meaning of a word is best revealed when the word is syntactically and grammatically least limited by its context. Individual word meaning becomes more limited and specialized as grammar and syntax become more complex. Similarly, the greater the possibility of lexical combinations of any one word in a given context, the more distinguishable the basic meaning of that word. Specialized contexts, particularly where a verb is closely associated with a noun in set expressions, limit and, thus, mask the basic meaning of a word. [Examples illustrate the syntactical and lexical limitations on basic meaning in the case of three particular verbs.]

With reference to paradigmatic characteristics, the semantic links of a word with its derivations (e.g. nouns from verbs) may be a further guide in determining basic meaning, as may the grammatical paradigm of a word (in that certain meanings of a verb may not be realizable in all its grammatical forms, thereby suggesting that such meanings are not basic).

Chosen words, counted from modern prose, proved to be used most frequently in their basic meaning. [Figures are given.]

Finally, psycholinguistic experiments have shown that structural criteria were the most significant in determining meanings. [Figures and procedures are given.] The basic meanings of three particular

## LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

verbs, as established by the use of the first two sets of criteria, were confirmed in the experiments.

The findings are important for the teaching of Russian to foreigners and for dictionary compilation. Apart from the possible shortcomings of the methods employed, the chief difficulty in establishing basic meanings is the constantly changing nature of linguistic meaning, including basic meanings.

**70-4**    **Lerot, Jacques.** Pour une sémantique formelle. [Towards formal semantics.] *Review for Applied Linguistics* (Louvain), 4 (1969), 5-17.

When the study of semantics began in the nineteenth century nothing more was envisaged than a study of the development of the meaning of words, using insights provided by psychology and logic. It was peripheral to the language sciences and concerned only with words in isolation. Synchronic studies of the twentieth century enlarged the study of the word to study of the semantic field, though at present only restricted areas of language have been studied in this way. Meanwhile in other disciplines (philosophy, logic, psychology) meaning was studied in a wider context covering all the means of communication and 'signs' in general. The latter disciplines were only concerned with whole utterances. Between the word and the utterance lies a scarcely explored area. Utterances may have linguistic significance in isolation or they may have a pragmatic significance within a context known to the hearer. Further study is here confined to declarative utterances and an attempt is made to determine how a study of linguistic significance is possible within the framework of competence of the speaker or the hearer. If one does not know a language a succession of the sounds of that language will convey no meaning; but extra-linguistic reality is not the concern here, rather the establishment of certain abstract classes whose function within the language can then be described. Study of the deep structure of the language touches upon semantic problems and constitutes, in effect, syntactic semantics. This will constitute a *formal* structure composed of simple entities organized into cate-

gories without reference to the objects designated. The system should reveal under what conditions these entities can be combined into correct expressions acceptable in a given language. The unities and structures described are called 'noological' to avoid confusion with 'concept' or 'content'. Noological rules will permit of intersection between some concepts and reject others. Further noological analysis of sentences will enable the linguist to discover principles for the elaboration of deep structures from which all possible correct structures in one language system can be derived. Generative grammar is working along similar lines and syntactic semantics may be able to shed fresh light on existing problems. [Examples throughout.]

## BILINGUALISM

**70-5** **Preston, Malcolm S. and Wallace E. Lambert.** Interlingual interference in a bilingual version of the Stroop color-word task. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* (New York), **8**, 2 (1969), 295-301.

Occasional interference between a bilingual's languages shows that the two language systems may come in contact or overlap in some fashion, and a set of experiments was made to examine the functional relations between the languages, attempting to determine whether the activation of one language system makes the other language system inoperative. Cards were used, one giving the names of colours, printed in black ink, to be read out, one giving blocks of colour to be named, and one giving the names of colours printed in non-corresponding coloured inks, from which the bilingual was asked to name the ink-colour in each language. Performance in the intralingual tasks is compared with performance in the interlingual tasks and in general results show that interference is in some cases as great in one situation as in the other. This depends partly on the bilingual's skill in the two languages and partly on the stimulus characteristics of the translated equivalents.

## LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

### LEXICAL STUDIES

- 70-6 †**Herdan, G.** Vocabulary structure and semantics. *Phonetica* (Basle), 19, 3 (1969), 142-55.

The word 'semantics' used to mean the change of the meaning of a word through history (now etymology) but has taken on the meaning of the special characteristics of speech structure; those qualities of words which separate the verbal representation of reality from reality itself.

It is shown here that certain numerical regularities exist in the accumulation of vocabulary in the language (diachronically), as well as regarding the richness of vocabulary in literary texts (synchronically) which lead to the conclusion that vocabulary distribution in literary texts can be regarded as the shortened recapitulation of the progress during 'linguification' of the world of experience.

Of particular interest in this connection, vocabulary frequency distribution, regarded by some linguists as of no linguistic importance, now appears as the shortened and compressed recapitulation of the semantic development of the language.

### TRANSLATION

- 70-7 **Hartman, R. R. K.** Linguistics and translation. *ASLIB Proceedings* (London), 21, 5 (1969), 190-4.

Insufficient is known about the process of translation, but linguistics can provide some of the tools with which to tackle translation. The linguistic scientist provides an explanation of the processes involved in the study of language. Applied linguistics borders on other disciplines, including that of computational linguistics. Too much has been made of 'machine translation', but it has taught linguists a great deal about the syntax and lexis of pairs of languages and the characteristics of restricted languages. Translation is a central concern of applied linguistics, but linguists have done little research into the problems of technical translation. However, in the last twenty years there has been enough interaction between teachers,

missionaries, computer engineers, philosophers, translators and linguists to develop a general understanding of the elementary processes. The main aim of translation is to reproduce as accurately as possible the grammatical and lexical features of the source language by using suitable equivalents in the target language, with the emphasis sometimes on fact and sometimes on form. Linguistics helps to categorize the types of text and to characterize the syntactic structures. Lexis is complex, and statistical counts can be used to determine the frequency of linguistic elements and give information on the characteristics of certain styles. Contrastive studies have been carried out on some European languages, mainly in connection with language teaching needs, and the study of contrastive semantics is fundamental to adequate translation. More research into translation within the framework provided by applied linguists is required.

## CONTRASTIVE LINGUISTICS

**70–8** James, Carl. Deeper contrastive study. *IRAL* (Heidelberg), 7, 2 (1969), 83–95.

Contrastive study of languages is not popular at present. Its reliability as a predictive device in foreign language teaching is in doubt. Generative grammar should be more widely used in contrastive studies as it can open up new possibilities of contrastive analysis. Exploration of the ways in which languages differently employ their deep structures and accounts of how and why certain proposed deep structure representations satisfy native speakers' intuitions will open new avenues in comparative linguistics. Contrastive studies can also contribute to the theory of translation. [Bibliography.]