

## Book Review

**András Kertész**, *The historiography of generative linguistics*, 2017. Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag GmbH, pp. 210. €56, ISBN 9783823381563.

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In this short volume, Hungarian philosopher of science, András Kertész outlines as well as critically investigates the process of the development and shaping of generativist views of linguistic theory and the philosophy of language, primarily reviewing those of Noam Chomsky. The primary issue addressed is not merely offering a historical, chronologically ordered survey of generative ideas and models, in contrast with other rivalling theoretical trends and models, but investigates to what extent the development of the core models of generative grammar and its variants meet the standard conditions of a scientifically and descriptively valid form of linguistic theorizing. As such, Chomsky's models taking shape in the course of half a century of generativism undergo a systematically precise analysis based on the author's theoretically grounded system of the evaluation of valid criteria of scientific argumentation and analysis, called the *p*-(plausible argumentation) *model* (Kertész and Rákosi 2012). Another, perhaps less essential, however internationally greatly popular, issue discussed in the book concerns the qualification of Chomskyan ideas and models revolutionary, as compared to earlier theoretical and empirically valid trends of linguistic investigations, including descriptivism, structuralism and behaviourism. Relying primarily on the Kuhn (1962/1970) notion of scientific revolution as well as various linguistic investigations of the historiography of generativism, including those of Newmeyer (1996), Allan (2003) and Koerner (2002), the author of the present volume analyses the revolutionary status and nature of Chomsky's models from *Syntactic structures* (1957) to the appearance of the most current – but still prevailing – model of minimalism introduced in (1995). There is commonplace agreement among researchers of the historiography of fields of science that revolutionary conditions or changes of development always occur at or along turning points caused by major shifts of the dominating paradigm of a given field. Concerning the occurrence of generative grammar, such changes certainly were taking shape powerfully and abruptly; the new field, dynamic in nature, as mentioned by Kertész, gaining ground powerfully over the static conditions and nature of Bloomfieldian and post-Bloomfieldian approaches to linguistic theorizing, as well as over American-based descriptivism, behaviourism and structuralism. Many scholars

of the historiography of generative grammar would agree that a major revolutionary historical landmark resulting in the destruction of the dominating ideas of American-based behaviourism was the appearance of the young Chomsky's radical attack formulated in his harsh criticism of Skinner's *Verbal behavior* (1957) published in the journal *Language* in (1959). It would have been useful to devote a few pages outlining and analysing these views in the book reviewed here. Another major, however natural, feature of scientific revolutions is manifested in the rejection of the systemic network of the basic categories of the formulation of the defeated earlier system of views via the introduction of new categorial networks and formal apparatuses replacing them. This has definitely occurred in the case of generative grammar with the appearance of its groundbreaking source *Syntactic structures* in (1957). Concerning the abruptness of the changes, views and insights are varied among researchers, however. Kertész, surveying the palette of these points, rightly points to the perceptible parallel between Chomskyan theory-internal formalism and that of his teacher Zellig Harris. Another parallel of theoretical importance with the views of Leonard Bloomfield concerns the neglect of semanticism and the powerfully developing idea of syntactocentrism in formulating the framework of his grammatical theory. Furthermore, as also pointed out by Kertész, another extremely important factor resulting in the paradigm shift taking shape more and more powerfully was the occurrence of the mathematically grounded systemic development of the theory of grammar resulting from Chomsky's joint work with the psychologist and philosopher of science giant of the era George Miller, especially in the earlier stages of his generativist ideas. This joint work of theirs, no doubt, significantly contributed to ruining the major tenets of structuralist and behaviourist approaches.

As already mentioned, a major feature of Chomskyan generativism is its internal dynamism, in opposition to the stative character of earlier schools of linguistic theories. The essence of this dynamism lies in considering language as a functioning human bodily organ, which constitutes the core of the establishment of a new paradigm – hence revolutionary in its nature – called 'biolinguistics'. Language, as pointed out in Chomsky and his followers and partners in thinking, including, among many others, one of his best students Ray Jackendoff and the philosopher Jerry Fodor, constitutes a massively modularly-based system of representational nature. Interpreting the functions and nature of modularity was – and still is – a hotly debated topic among theorists in the course of the 90s, the critical period when the mainstream of generativism gradually split into two parts or trends, based on different views about and the theoretical method of handling the status of the expression of meaning. As discussed in detail on the pages of Chapter 2 of Kertész's historical survey, representatives of the mainstream, called 'interpretative semanticists',

held the view that the core of the ‘language machine’ was syntactically-based, whereas in the view of those in opposition, all major figures being Chomsky’s former students, including George Lakoff, John Robert Ross, Paul Postal, David Perlmutter and others, semantics constituted the basic core component in the operation of language serving as an input to the complex operation of the syntactic machine. The views of the latter trend still expressed in a generative framework in the initial shaping of its development were termed ‘generative semantics’. It was this trend, historically short lived, which, after getting rid of the generative framework of representation, laid the grounds for the development of cognitive linguistics in later years and decades, culminating in a total theoretical separation from and rejection of the framework(s) of Chomsky’s views. It is a pity that in this short monograph Kertész did not have the possibility of including a thorough, potentially highly interesting and relevant, comparison of the classic mainstream trend and the more and more powerful model of cognitive-linguistics thinking and its later developments in the form of cognitive grammar and construction grammar. But even staying within the strictly generative framework, the knowledgeable reader of Kertész’s book would miss argumentation over its closely related subfields such as the generative, however, constructionist model of Ray Jackendoff, Pustejovsky’s model of the generative lexicon, and trends or models shaped in Bresnan’s and co-workers’ LFG or that of HPSG.

The lack of argumentation over cognitive linguistic approaches to language in comparison with Chomsky’s mainstream generative framework is especially missed for the reason of both considering themselves – and being considered by critics – initiators of biolinguistics research, as expressed specifically in Berwick and Chomsky (2011) as well as in Gallese and Lakoff (2005). Biolinguistics, and the currently rapidly developing neurolinguistic research, beyond any doubt comprise a radical shift of paradigm of researching the functioning of language, manifesting themselves as revolutionary approaches to linguistic investigations, interfacing with several other scientific fields of research.

The target matter of Kertész’s historiographical survey and critical review presented in the first part of the book is clearly restricted to metahistoriographically overviewing the relevant literature, covering 22 different approaches to Chomsky’s models of generative syntax discussed in their chronological order, from *Syntactic structures* to the appearance of the so-called *Aspects* model (1965), replaced by the publication of his Pisa lectures titled *Lectures on Government and Binding* in (1981), later called the theory of Principles and Parameters, all the way through the appearance of *The Minimalist Program* in (1995). It is noted throughout the overview that the critical facet of the development of Chomsky’s program through all of its stages of development

has principally been researching the process and system of the child's acquisition of language. Interestingly, although Chomsky acknowledges the fact that the process of the child's language acquisition stems in facing human discursive corpora of his/her human environment, he still notoriously rejects the idea of investigating language performance by way of corpus-analysis. Neither has he ever been interested in analysing discursive bodies of linguistic representation. The core issue for him has systematically and consistently been the analysis of the internal syntactic representation of the linguistic machinery, hence sticking to the priority of purely and strictly 'clean' syntactocentrism, the heart of universal grammar, the development, structure and speakers' competence of I-language. Concerning the notion of constructions and constructionist approaches to the theory of grammar, Kertész notes that in his model Chomsky continuously adheres to highlighting the relevance of principles and parameters referring to phenomena of constructionalization in syntax, rather than accepting the centrality of the notion as outlined by constructionist or cognitive grammarians.

Kertész notes (p. 86) that Chomsky himself, in the self-assessment of his own theory, declares that the shifts occurring in the history of generative linguistic studies were "refinements" rather than precisely and strictly shaped models. With this idea and attitude in mind, it would have been highly interesting – and important – to argue over why he called the latest, still prevailing, version of his theory a 'program' rather than as a 'model'. Where exactly may lie the borderline differences between a theoretical model and a program, one may (or Kertész should) ask?

It is pointed out, however, that the shifts of the Chomskyan models of the generative paradigm did not take place in the form of the occurrence of new basic concepts gradually taking ground in the structure of a continuously developing mainstream model via their integration into it, but by the total and abrupt rejection and replacement of standard basic terms and features of the older model-variants. This characteristically essential feature of the development of the theoretical framework in itself is manifested radically, which, in my view, is a revolutionary mode of change in the development of the paradigm. Let us just take, as examples, the loss or replacement of the theoretically important terms of deep versus surface structure, or the conceptually grounded notion, status and role of transformations. In the new mainstream model, the new concepts introduced naturally served as ground-pillars instead of the old rejected ones – for instance, the status of notion of recursivity, Move  $\alpha$ , the radical reduction of the number of rules, etc. in the Minimalist Program.

In characterizing the nature and scope of Chomsky's argumentation in his models, Kertész refers to Allan (2003) when he recognizes a shift from

phenomenological inductivist (of American linguistics) to hypothetico-deductivism, following of an axiomatic-deductive method (pp. 31 and 45). One may wonder how this opinion is related to the theory of tagmemic analysis and the American-based descriptive typology of the American Indian languages, neither of which fields is discussed in the volume.

Throughout the whole of the book, Kertész provides useful summaries of the variously based forms of argumentation of the overviewed literature in the form of presenting succinctly phrased answers to the problem-domains raised, in the form of an itemized list of Ps closing each of the sections, paving the way to the introduction into the argumentation of his own theoretical model, the so-called *p-model*, the metatheoretical model of plausible argumentation.

The second part of the book is devoted to discussing his framework in its application to a thorough analysis of the historiographical overview of the process of the development of Chomsky's model of generativism in linguistic representation. The grounds of Kertész's approach are constituted in his P-statement given as SP23. The evaluation of Chomsky's theoretical programme takes shape in a systematic overview of its theoretical theses in the form of a re-evaluation of linguistic knowledge about grammar through the prism of the author's theory. The basic features of the investigation are provided as a thesis under T23: "The history of generative linguistics is a process of plausible argumentation based on the cyclic, prismatic and retrospective re-evaluation of the linguist's knowledge of grammars" (pp. 123–124). It is pointed out in the analysis following and justified in Chapters 4 and 5 that such a tenet is fully compatible with Chomsky's mode of developing his grammar along the principles of descriptive as well as explanatory adequacy and validity of argumentation.

Kertész's *p-model* works as a dynamic theory, along the following criteria of grammatical description and argumentation hypothesized: (i) uncertainty of data, (ii) nature of the plausibility of statements, (iii) plausibility, rather than deductive character of inferences, (iv) plausible argumentation, (v) dynamic processes rather than static states involved in plausible argumentation, (vi) tolerance of inconsistency, uncertainty of data, (vii) pluralism instead of absolutism, whereby axiomatics is rejected in argumentation, (viii) linguistic facts are not axiomatic in their nature, and (ix) continuous revision of observations, refusal of rigidity (pp. 124–127). Consequently, in Kertész's framework observations concerning the grammaticality of data should strictly be based on prismatic plausible statements of analysis (p. 129). However, the vitally important notion of the framework of *p-context* underlying reliance on the above set of factors in plausible argumentation requires further, more precise clarification and definition than as given on page 129. The character of informational over- versus under-determination (pp. 132–133) needs illustration

via examples, in addition to the reference merely given in footnote 20. Useful discussion about the facts and fallibility of the nature of over- versus under-generation in generative grammar, together with plausible reasoning, can be found in Taylor (2012: 8, 184).

Chapter 5 presents case studies discussing differences between the notions ‘sentence’ and ‘utterance’ in Chomsky’s generative grammar and in Bloomfieldian as well as neo-Bloomfieldian theorizing. It is noted that for Bloomfield the two structural domains are different; however, his notion of the utterance was largely quantitatively characterized with its discourse-related basis in the background, whereas Chomsky, in early periods of his work, used the two notions synonymously (p. 141). Summing up Chomsky’s characterization of the sentence in opposition to the notion of utterance in Table 2 (p. 142), Kertész cleverly refers to an interesting quotation from the father of generative grammar: “a grammar generates all grammatically possible utterances” (Chomsky 1957: 48). How interesting it is to read this from the theoretician of syntactocentrism, who was – and to some extent still is – a harsh critic and opponent of linguistic pragmatic views!

Chapter 6 serves as a sort of summary to the book, discussing open questions claiming to be answered in future research and, at the same time, summing up the main tenets and issues of generative linguistic research discussed in the book.

Let me close this review by expressing a personal desire left out of consideration in this monograph, written at a high level of expertise. I can only wish that future historiographers of generative grammar undertook testing the descriptive and explanatory potentials of the models or programs based on a complex analysis of a set of the same sentences discussed by each of the variant models at disposal.

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