

Recenzió

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András Kertész:

The Historiography of Generative Linguistics

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Noam Chomsky's work is believed by many to have revolutionized the discipline of linguistics. Whereas several historiographers consider Chomsky's activity revolutionary in one way or another, a large number of them hold a different opinion. Kertész's (2017) monograph introduces the reader into, as well as takes the reader beyond, the diversity of approaches towards the role of generative linguistics from a historiographical standpoint.

The three aims of the book are formulated at the beginning. The first one is to overview the different historiographical approaches to generative linguistics in an unbiased way, the second aim is to indicate the limitations of the variety of perspectives as far as credibility is concerned, and the third objective is to extend the set of historiographical approaches with a novel one and to illustrate that the new approach sheds fresh light on the history of generative linguistics.

In order to fulfill these aims, the book quests for the solution of the problem (P) of "What historiographical framework, central hypothesis and basic terms can account for the history of generative grammar?" (Kertész 2017: 14).

The monograph is divided into two main parts. In Part 1 the various historiographical approaches are enumerated and are scrutinized in the light of the problem (P). Chapter 2 provides solutions to the problem (P) according to each examined approach. Chapter 3 sets the criteria for evaluation of the historiographical approaches and highlights how certain approaches do not meet these criteria. Part 2 is concerned with the presentation of a new historiographical approach which satisfies the criteria of evaluation and also enriches the understanding of the history of generative linguistics. Chapter 4 focuses on the introduction of the p-model as a new historiographical framework and Chapter 5 discusses its workability through a case study. Chapter 6 raises some open questions and Chapter 7 summarizes the major conclusions.

In Part 1 Chapter 2 the author presents 22 historiographical approaches to generative linguistics in a systematic way in order to reconstruct their solutions to (P). The approaches vary to a large extent in their thesis, in their framework, and also in their terminology. Certain historiographers consider a specific work of Chomsky's to have triggered a revolution, while others claim the opposite. As for the framework, historiographers work with different technical apparatus such as that of Kuhn's (1970 [1962]), among others, and use the terminology accordingly. As a starting point the author highlights the main ideas of Kuhn's work and then continues to investigate the varying historiographical stances towards each

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major work of Chomsky's that are *Syntactic Structures* (1957), *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965), *The Sound Pattern of English* (Chomsky & Halle, 1968), *Lectures on Government and Binding* (1981) and *The Minimalist Program* (1995).

In this review, I focus only on the approaches to *Syntactic Structures* since they are an integral part of the discussion of the case study presented in Chapter 5, and also summarizing all the approaches is beyond the scope of this review. Kuhn's work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* had a great impact on the evaluation of Chomsky's activity. In his book, Kuhn describes the developmental stages of natural sciences and suggests that paradigm shifts, anomalies and crises pave the way for a scientific revolution. Several historiographers of linguistics take Kuhn's ideas and terms as a point of reference in describing and evaluating the rise of generative linguistics. Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* is considered as a Kuhnian revolution, as a non-Kuhnian revolution, and also as not being a revolution by different historiographers.

On the one hand, Koerner (1978), among others, supports the view that *Syntactic Structures* has been a revolution in Kuhn's sense. What made *Syntactic Structures* revolutionary according to Koerner (1978) is that Chomsky was able to adjust to the climate of opinion of natural sciences of the 1950s. He applied the formal methods of natural sciences to linguistics favoring deductive theorizing and the superiority of theory over data. Ten Hacken (2007) holds the perspective that *Syntactic Structures* has been a revolution, though not in Kuhn's interpretation. He proposes the term research program instead of Kuhn's paradigm to emphasize the intellectual and to dismiss the social aspect of the revolution. A research program may consist of a number of empirical cycles which means that it may involve not only one but more theories. The research program of generative linguistics consists of the Standard Theory, Government-Binding Theory and the Minimalist Program. According to ten Hacken (2007), *Syntactic Structures* has been an intellectual revolution and as a result a new research program, Chomskyan linguistics, appeared.

On the other hand, Koerner (1995) holds the standpoint that *Syntactic Structures* does not represent a revolution but an evolution since it stems from the work and methodology of neo-Bloomfieldian linguistics. Tomalin (2008) does not regard *Syntactic Structures* as revolutionary either. He emphasizes the rootedness of generative linguistics in the formal sciences because of its use of formal methods. He suggests that the methods of neo-Bloomfieldian linguistics were also shaped by the formal sciences. Matthews (1993) believes that *Syntactic Structures* has not triggered a Kuhnian revolution as it actually further develops the idea of distribution raised by neo-Bloomfieldian linguistics. Murray (1989, 1994), taking a sociological stand, also interprets the emergence of *Syntactic Structures* as a continuity. He claims that it does not contain substantial innovations, its appearance has not been preceded by a crisis and it has not started a revolution. According to Murray, Chomsky and his group used revolutionary rhetoric and performed a coup.

After presenting a wide range of historiographical approaches towards Chomsky's above-mentioned works and their solutions to (P) in a structured manner, the author accentuates the correlations and differences appearing among the approaches.

In Chapter 3, the author proposes a set of criteria for the evaluation of the solutions to the problem (P) provided by the 22 historiographical approaches discussed in Chapter 2. He suggests that the first subset of criteria concerns the phenomenon of bias and the second subset revolves around the issue of method. As for bias, the author emphasizes the requirement of the highest possible level of impartiality. He argues that historiographers' work should not be shaped by their bias towards or against either another historiographer, or

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Chomsky's personality, or the object of investigation. Historiographers should also avoid the legitimization of generative linguistics. As far as the method is concerned, the author believes that historiographers should not disregard either the philosophy of science or the historiography of science. He highlights that the previously overviewed approaches do not completely meet all the proposed criteria; hence, the need for a new approach rises.

In Part 2 Chapter 4, the author's first step towards the development of a novel approach is the introduction of a new framework called the p-model (Kertész & Rákosi 2012, 2014). The p-model makes it possible to perceive the development of generative linguistics not as a linear but as a dynamic process, being able to handle diachronic and synchronic issues as well. It has four basic characteristics, i.e. plausibility, retrospective re-evaluation, prismatic and cyclic argumentation. The model is rooted in the process of plausible argumentation proposing that statements are not true with certainty but are acceptable only to some extent, in other words, the statements are plausible. Statements receive their plausibility values based on the reliability of their sources. These sources together with latent background assumptions and methodological tools constitute the p-context. When the p-context is incomplete or inconsistent it becomes p-problematic and this is when re-evaluation takes place. Retrospective re-evaluation, the revision of previously established knowledge, is an integral part of the p-model. The re-evaluation of earlier pieces of information may be carried out several times in a cyclic fashion through which the argumentation arrives at a revised, modified piece of information in each cycle. The re-consideration is also prismatic in the sense that it is conducted through the prism of a new piece of information, in the light of a new aspect.

In Chapter 5, the author narrows down the problem (P) to (P'), i.e. "What historiographical framework, central hypothesis and basic terms can account for the relationship between *Syntactic Structures* and neo-Bloomfieldian linguistics?" (Kertész 2017: 138). Then, he shows the workability of the p-model through three issues raised in *Syntactic Structures* that are the concept of language, grammar and the evaluation procedure. As for language, the author departs from the definitions and statements provided in *Syntactic Structures* and aims to reconstruct the p-context of the term. He suggests that the plausibility of the statements proposed about the term 'language' have two sources; Bloomfield's (1926) definition of language and Zellig S. Harris's terminology. Whereas Bloomfield makes a difference between the terms 'sentence' and 'utterance', Harris treats them as synonyms. Neither the Bloomfieldian nor the neo-Bloomfieldian ideas are applied directly, though. They are re-evaluated through the prism of formalism in the sense of mathematics. The p-context is extended with Post's (1944) term of 'algorithm' as a third source. The author believes that the relationship between *Syntactic Structures* and neo-Bloomfieldian linguistics can be explained with the help of the p-model as a cyclic, prismatic process of constant retrospective re-evaluation.

Chapter 6 presents some open questions for historiographical approaches to generative linguistics. The questions are related to the development of Chomskyan linguistics raising diachronic and synchronic problems as well. The author tackles these issues and outlines a possible solution in the light of the p-model. One of the questions of diachrony is "What are the constant elements present in every developmental stage of generative linguistics?" (Kertész 2017: 167). Different historiographers provide various answers. The author points out that, for example, Tomalin (2008) suggests that it is formalism that has been constantly part of Chomsky's theories. However, according to the author, nothing has remained the same. Whereas *Syntactic Structures* aims to use the terms and methods of formal sciences, the Theory of Government and Binding does not do so. The latter claims to be a formal system, though. Therefore, the author emphasizes that there are no constant elements that are present

in each and every stage of generative linguistics in the same state but there is a constant change instead.

The monograph examines various historiographical approaches towards the development of Chomskyan linguistics. It systematically discusses a set of previous approaches and extends it with a novel one in the light of a new framework, i.e. the p-model. The model handles this development neither as a revolution nor as a decline but as some kind of dynamic process. It is based on the idea of plausible argumentation and allows for a constant re-evaluation of previously attained information because of its cyclic character. The book provides a comprehensive view of Chomskyan linguistics from a historiographical perspective which contributes to the widening of the horizon about the field of linguistics. The aims, the focus and the structure of the monograph are clearly stated and the reader is constantly guided through the flow of argumentation.

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