



History of Linguistics

The Eastern Traditions of Linguistics

Volume 1

Edited by
Giulio Lepschy



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History of Linguistics

*Volume I: The Eastern Traditions
of Linguistics*
*Volume II: Classical and
Medieval Linguistics*
GIULIO LEPSCHY

History of Linguistics

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Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
<i>Notes on the contributors</i>	xvi
1 Chinese linguistics	1
<i>Göran Malmqvist</i>	
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 The period prior to the Qin (–221 BC)	3
1.3 The periods of Qin and Han (221 BC–220 AD)	4
1.4 The periods of Wei, Jin and Nanbeichao (220–581)	9
1.5 The periods of Sui, Tang and Song (581–1279)	11
1.6 The periods of Yuan and Ming (1260–1644)	15
1.7 The period of Qing (1644–1912) up to the end of the nineteenth century	17
<i>Notes</i>	22
<i>Bibliography</i>	23
2 Indian linguistics	25
<i>George Cardona</i>	
2.1 Introduction	25
2.2 Early work on phonetics and phonology	27
2.3 Etymology	30
2.4 Pāṇini	33
2.5 Pāṇini and later commentators	41
2.6 Interest in dialects	46
2.7 Development of a philosophy of language	48
2.8 Summary	50
<i>Notes</i>	51
<i>Bibliography</i>	58
3 Linguistics in the ancient Near East	61
<i>Erica Reiner</i>	
3.1 Introduction	61

3.2	Ancient Egyptian linguistics	63
	<i>Janet H. Johnson</i>	
	<i>Notes</i>	72
	<i>Bibliography</i>	73
3.3	Sumerian	76
	<i>Miguel Civil</i>	
	<i>Notes</i>	85
	<i>Bibliography</i>	86
3.4	Akkadian	87
	<i>Erica Reiner</i>	
	<i>Notes</i>	94
	<i>Bibliography</i>	95
4	Hebrew linguistics	97
	<i>Raphael Loewe</i>	
4.1	Introduction	97
4.2	Time concepts	99
4.3	Language and metaphysics: Torah, Hebrew and Babel	100
4.4	Late antiquity. Languages in Palestine and in the Jewish diaspora	102
4.5	Jewish language-satellites	106
4.6	Philological, philosophical and theological interests	113
4.7	The cabbalistic transformer	132
4.8	Renaissance illusions: Haskalah and Aufklärung	133
4.9	The handmaiden of nineteenth-century nationalism	135
4.10	The dethronement of tradition	138
4.11	Master and servant	142
	<i>Notes</i>	143
	<i>Bibliography</i>	152
5	Arabic linguistics	164
	<i>Henri Fleisch</i>	
5.1	Introduction	165
5.2	Classical Arabic	166
5.3	The holy Book	169
5.4	The 'Grammarians'	171
5.5	Linguistic analyses of the grammarians	173
5.6	Greek influences	179
	<i>Notes</i>	180
	<i>Bibliography</i>	183
Index		185

Introduction

This work originated in the discussions held by a group of advisors for linguistics of the Italian publishers il Mulino. Examining the areas in which new and useful initiatives could be encouraged, it was thought that a large-scale history of linguistics would meet a widely felt need, and I was asked to elaborate a plan for such a work. The preparation and completion of the project took about ten years, and the work, written by scholars from different countries, began appearing in Italian in 1990. This English edition has been reorganized into four volumes. In this introduction I shall say something about the nature and contents of this work, and its place within the present panorama of linguistic historiography.

What I had in mind was a history of linguistic thought, rather than an account of the development of linguistic science. In other words, for different societies and in different periods, I wanted to have a presentation of the prevailing attitudes towards language: its social, cultural, religious and liturgical functions, the prestige attached to different varieties, the cultivation of a standard, the place of language in education, the elaboration of lexical and grammatical descriptions, the knowledge of foreign idioms, the status of interpreters and translators, and so on.

This implies of course a 'view from within', that is, presenting the linguistic interests and assumptions of individual cultures in their own terms, without trying to transpose and reshape them into the context of our ideas of what the scientific study of language ought to be. The purpose is an understanding of what certain societies thought about language, rather than an assessment of their ideas on a scale of scientific progress.

The problem is familiar to historians of science and the line I am following does not necessarily imply a lack of confidence in the

possibility of obtaining reliable findings in linguistic study. Whether 'science' is the most suitable term for what linguistics does, is of course open to debate: see Chomsky (1969, 56) and Graffi (1991b). In any case, the authors of different chapters were also encouraged not to enlarge on methodological problems posed by linguistic historiography but to concentrate instead on the presentation of facts, on the interpretation of texts which they considered relevant and interesting for the periods and cultures they were discussing. But, after obtaining the agreement of my authors concerning the general aims, I left them completely free to organize their chapters as they thought fit, without trying to impose a unifying format, because I thought that differences of perspective and treatment would contribute to highlighting specific features of individual traditions. For instance, the chapters on Indian and Arabic concentrate on the elaboration of grammatical analysis, in both cases an important contribution of these civilizations, whereas the Hebrew chapter places more stress on the theological, mystical and philosophical context of Jewish reflections on language.

The content of the four volumes of the English edition is as follows: Volume I includes the ancient traditions, each of which develops in a manner which is, from a viewpoint both cultural and chronological, largely independent, apart from obvious connections, like those between Arabic and Hebrew thought in the Middle Ages. (The Graeco-Roman tradition, which is the basis of those reflections on language which we present chronologically in Volumes II–IV, appears at the beginning of the second volume.) Chapter 1, by Göran Malmqvist, of Stockholm University, describes the development of Chinese linguistics, analysing the relevant lexicographical and grammatical works, and throwing light on the particular shape imposed on phonological analysis by the logographic nature of Chinese script. Chapter 2, by George Cardona, of the University of Pennsylvania, presents the Indian grammatical tradition, its cultural and religious implications, and particularly the contribution of Pāṇini, illustrating its systematic character and its attention to detail. Chapter 3, supervised by Erica Reiner of the University of Chicago, presents and interprets the documents which bear witness to linguistic interests and knowledge in the civilizations of the ancient near East; the chapter is divided into three sections, devoted to Ancient Egyptian (by Janet Johnson), Sumerian (by Miguel Civil), and Akkadian (by Erica Reiner). Chapter 4, by Raphael Loewe, of the University of London, examines the place of language within the Hebrew tradition, from the Biblical period, through the Talmudists, the mystics, the enlightenment, down to the rebirth of Hebrew as an everyday language,

paying particular attention to the philosophical and cultural implications of these trends. Chapter 5, by the late Henri Fleisch, of Saint Joseph University in Beirut, probably the last essay to flow from the pen of this eminent scholar, deals synthetically with the original system of grammatical analysis elaborated by the great Arabic civilization of the Middle Ages.

The following volumes present the main stages of the European tradition, in their chronological succession. They include two chapters each. In Volume II, the first chapter, by Peter Matthews, of Cambridge University, deals with classical linguistics and offers a reading of the main texts of the Graeco-Roman world which elaborate the grammatical categories on which we still base our analysis of language. The second chapter, by Edoardo Vineis, of Bologna University, and (for the philosophy of language) by Alfonso Maierù, of Rome University, presents a detailed discussion of language study from the end of the sixth to the end of the fourteenth century, not limited to the late medieval period which has received most attention in recent years (with particular reference to Modistic philosophy), but extending to the less frequently studied early Middle Ages.

In Volume III, the first chapter, by Mirko Tavoni, of Pisa University, covers the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and is completed by two sections, one on *Slavia Romana*, by M. D. Gandolfo, and one on *Slavia Orthodoxa*, by S. Toscano; the bibliography of this chapter takes advantage of the great Renaissance Linguistic Archive set up by M. Tavoni at the Istituto di Studi Rinascimentali in Ferrara. The second chapter, by Raffaele Simone, of Rome University, offers a helpful map of the varied terrain constituted by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century culture, in which many of the roots are found from which the great plant of later comparative linguistics derives its nourishment; R. Simone, who is a professional linguist, keeps in mind the philosophical perspective that is particularly relevant for this period.

In Volume IV, the first chapter, by Anna Morpurgo Davies, of Oxford University, examines the flowering of historical and comparative linguistics in the nineteenth century, stressing in particular some aspects which traditional presentations, focusing on the Neogrammarians, sometimes leave in the shadow, like the interest in typological classifications, and the importance for comparative philology of the newly constituted German university system in the first three decades of the century. The second chapter, by the editor of this work, offers a synthesis of the main developments in twentieth-century linguistics, extending from the progress of comparative studies to linguistic theory, philosophy of language, and

the investigation of language use in different areas, from literature to social communication. The Italian edition also includes a chapter on the history of Italian linguistics and dialectology, by Paola Benincà, of Padua University, which has been omitted from the English edition.

Let us briefly look at the present state of linguistic historiography. Over the last three decades there has been a considerable revival of interest in this field. In 1974 Konrad Koerner, a German scholar teaching in Canada, founded the journal *Historiographia Linguistica*, which has become a forum for international discussion on the history of linguistics; in 1978 he was the organizer of the first international congress on the history of linguistics (the meetings continue at three-yearly intervals). There are also several other associations devoted to the history of linguistics, like the Société d'histoire et d'épistémologie des sciences du langage, created in 1978, presided over by S. Auroux, which publishes a Bulletin and the journal *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* (1979-); the Henry Sweet Society for the History of Linguistic Ideas, founded in 1984 on the initiative of Vivian Salmon, which organizes regular meetings and publishes a *Newsletter*; the North American Association for the History of the Language Sciences, founded in 1987. The interest in the history of linguistics over this period is also indicated by the publication of monographs and collections of studies, such as Hymes (1974), Parret (1976), Grotsch (1982), Schmitter (1982), Chevalier and Encrevé (1984), Bynon and Palmer (1986), Formigari and Lo Piparo (1988), and by the two tomes devoted to the historiography of linguistics by Sebeok (1975).

A separate study would be necessary to examine the main available histories of linguistics, from the great works of the nineteenth century devoted to Classical linguistics by Steinthal (1863), to Oriental philology by Benfey (1869), and to Germanic philology by R. von Raumer (1870). Subsequent studies witness the triumph of Neogrammarian comparative philology, from Delbrück (1880) to Meillet (1903) to Pedersen (1924). Since the 1960s numerous historical presentations have been published, from the large and well-informed work by Tagliavini (1963), lacking however in historical perspective and theoretical insight, to the two-volume contribution by Mounin (1967-72), the neat and well-balanced book by Robins (1967), the acute and comprehensive synthesis by Law (1990), the disappointing attempts by Malmberg (1991) and Itkonen (1991). Large-scale works have also started appearing in the last few years, under the direction of Auroux (n.d.) and of Schmitter (1987). There is no space to mention in this context the great many studies devoted, since the 1960s, to individual periods and problems in the

history of linguistics, although they often provide the detailed groundwork that makes possible overall synthetic assessments (some titles will be quoted in the list of references).

What is the place of our history of linguistics against this background? To me it seems to be placed in an advantageous position, in the middle ground between the concise, one-author profiles on the one hand, and the extended, multi-authored, multi-volume series on the other. Compared to the former, it has the greater richness of detail, which is made possible by the larger space available and the higher degree of reliability that derives from the authority of contributors who are specialists in the individual areas; compared to the latter, it is more compact and coherent in perspective and basic assumptions, and it can not only be consulted for single questions, or studied in individual sections, but also be read in its entirety.

If I were asked to present a schematic *précis* of the main features which I see as inspiring this work and characterizing its realization, I would list the following points:

1. A perspective directed towards understanding the past, rather than dealing with present-day concerns. The aim is to reconstruct and illustrate different epochs and traditions within their own context and on the basis of their own values, rather than of their appeal to present-day preoccupations; to highlight their linguistic interests, rather than our own.
2. This is a history of linguistic thought, of interests and attitudes toward language. These may or may not find a place within the elaboration of a 'scientific' study of language (however we may want to define it), but in any case I feel that an account of the preoccupations with linguistic matters in different societies proves to be an interesting and worthwhile object of historical investigation.
3. I have considered it essential, in my choice of authors for individual chapters, that they should be specialists, able to analyse the relevant texts in the original languages, and to present them to a lay readership. I aimed at obtaining not an account of what is known, derived from current literature, but a series of original contributions based on first-hand study of the primary sources.
4. From what precedes it is clear that this work is prevalently concerned with a historical and philological study of ideas, texts from the past, rather than with methodological and theoretical problems posed by historiography. It is an 'extroverted', rather than an 'introverted' history, dealing with the

facts it analyses, rather than with the theoretical and ideological assumptions which lie behind the work of the historian. This obviously does not imply that methodological questions are not a legitimate object of study; but I believe that it is possible to offer useful contributions on the history of linguistics, without dealing in the first instance with the theory of historiography.

5. One of the main linguists of our times, Yakov Malkiel, observed some years ago (Malkiel and Langdon 1969) that to produce good work on the history of linguistics it is not enough to be a linguist: one has also to be a historian, and to fulfil the expectations normally raised by a historical essay. Here, of course, one can only observe that the ability to set some episodes of the history of linguistics within their social and cultural context, is the exception rather than the rule (examples that come to mind are those of Dionisotti (1967a,b, 1972) or Timpanaro (1963, 1965, 1972, 1973)). What I had in mind for this history of linguistics was the more modest aim of providing information about ideas on language, in different periods and societies, which are not easily (and in some cases not at all) accessible elsewhere.

I know from direct experience that linguists feel the need for a work of this kind, and I hope it may also appeal to readers who are interested to know how people, at different times and within different cultural traditions, have looked at one of the most essential and challenging features of our common humanity – that is, language.

G. C. Lepschy

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Chinese linguistics

Göran Malmqvist

1.1 Introduction *

The Chinese language has traditionally been characterized as a monosyllabic and isolating tone language. This characterization is certainly valid for the earlier stages of the development of the language. In the last thousand years a rapid and far-reaching phonological reduction, accompanied by the development of certain morphological features, such as affixation and compounding, has resulted in the creation of many disyllabic and polysyllabic words. But this development has not reduced the concept of the monosyllabicity of the language to a myth: the overwhelming majority of Chinese morphemes – whether free or bound – are monosyllabic and represented by a unique sign, a written character or logograph.

I shall here devote myself solely to a discussion of the techniques and the results of traditional studies, leaving aside modern studies influenced by trends in Western linguistics. I shall also refrain from discussing the paleographical remains (the oracle bone inscriptions dating back to the Shang period, 1520–1030 BC) which were discovered towards the very end of the last century and the study of which has turned into a highly specialized discipline. Again, I shall refrain from discussing the results of comparative studies within the Sino-Tibetan language family, which since the 1940s have greatly added to our knowledge of both Early Archaic Chinese (roughly the first millennium BC) and Proto-Chinese (the period preceding the earliest literary documents). Traditional language studies recognize the following three stages in the development of the language: Old Chinese (the first half of the first millennium

* See beginning of Notes.

BC), Middle Chinese (the Sui and Tang periods, 581–907 AD) and Old Mandarin (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries AD).

The following periodization of traditional Chinese language studies roughly corresponds with important stages in the development of the language:

1. the period prior to the Qin (–221 BC);
2. the periods of Qin and Han (221 BC–220 AD);
3. the periods of Wei, Jin and Nanbeichao (220–581);
4. the periods of Sui, Tang and Song (581–1279);
5. the periods of Yuan and Ming (1260–1644);
6. the period of Qing (1644–1912) up to the end of the nineteenth century.

The logographic nature of the Chinese script has to a very great extent conditioned traditional Chinese linguistics. The logograph has from earliest times been conceived of as a unit possessing a unique shape, a basic meaning and a particular sound. Traditional Chinese linguistics may therefore be divided into three branches, dealing with the analysis and explanation of logographs, semantic glosses and lexicography, and phonology respectively.

The study of morphology and syntax plays an insignificant role in traditional Chinese linguistics. It is interesting to note that the first systematic *Chinese* grammar of the Chinese language did not appear until 1898 (*Mashi wentong*: the comprehensive grammar of Ma Jianzhong) and that it represents a fairly successful attempt at applying the categories of Latin grammar to the Chinese language. The lack of interest on the part of traditional Chinese linguists in systematic research into the internal structure of words and the functions of words in the sentence is no doubt conditioned by the logographic nature of the script which gives no clue to the internal analysis of the word.

The non-phonetic nature of the script is probably also mainly responsible for the slowly developing awareness of diachronic linguistic change. Also dialectal variation is effectively hidden under the cloak of the logographs. The early ventures into the field of 'dialectology' which will be discussed later were mainly motivated by an interest in semantics.

In traditional China pursuit of learning was considered as an effective tool for the betterment of the self and of society. All branches of learning – and particularly studies in the humanities – had a very strong ideological motivation. The majority of studies in script analysis, semantics and phonology aimed at elucidating ancient texts which issued from the Confucian school and which